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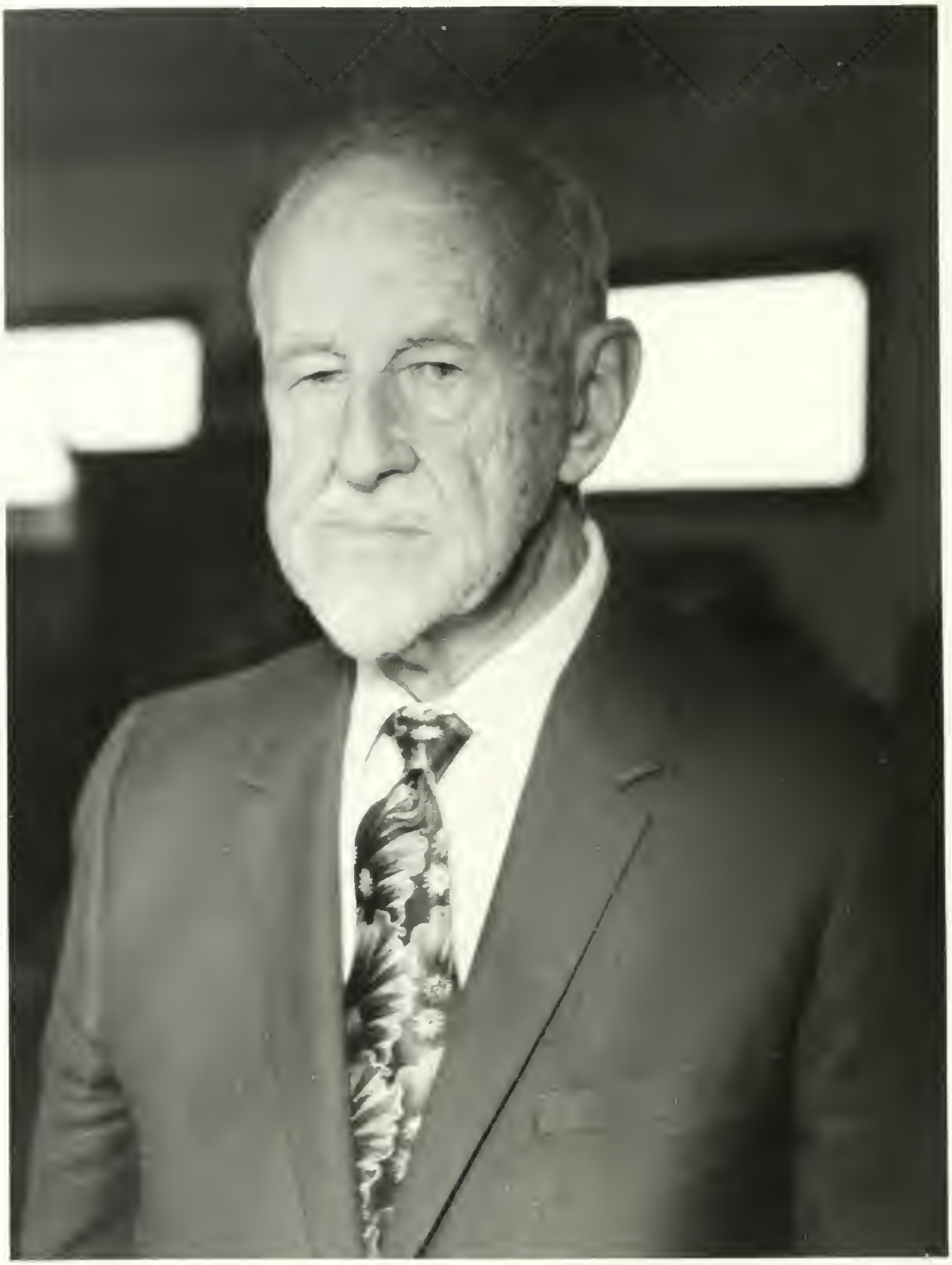

CALIFORNIA BIBLIOGRAPHERS: FATHER AND SON

Robert G. Cowan

Interviewed by Joel Gardner

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

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[Frontis: photograph of Robert G. Cowan, 1979; following p. 44: photograph of Robert E. Cowan, from Touring Topics (January 1930)]

INTRODUCTION

Among booksellers, book collectors, librarians, and scholars the names of Robert Ernest Cowan and his son, Robert Granniss Cowan, are synonymous with the bibliography of California and the collections and the accumulated knowledge which provided the basis for the bibliographies. It is interesting to note that the two collections of Californiana acquired by Robert Ernest Cowan during his lifetime both went to the University of California. The first was purchased by Collis P. Huntington in 1897 for the library of the University of California at Berkeley (preceding by some ten years Berkeley's acquisition of the Bancroft Library). Just over forty years later, in 1936, Cowan's second, and much larger, collection was sold to UCLA, where it is housed in the Department of Special Collections. So rich was this library that even after the sale the duplicates were the equivalent of a third collection.

Another connection with UCLA is to be found in Robert E. Cowan's employment as librarian of the library of William Andrews Clark, Jr., from 1919 to 1933. This collection has, since Mr. Clark's death in 1934, been a part of the UCLA library system.

In the interview which follows, Robert Granniss

Cowan gives an account of his father's life and careers, as well as his own. This introduction is in the nature of a biographical summary.

Robert Ernest Cowan was born in Toronto, Canada, on July 2, 1862, the son of Robert Hawke and Lydia Rebecca (Peer) Cowan. He came to San Francisco in 1870 and remained a resident of that city until 1926. As a young man he studied medicine for a year or two, but decided against the medical profession and became a clerk in a San Francisco book and music store. During the 1880s he began collecting Californiana, a subject which engaged his lifelong interest.

In 1894 Robert E. Cowan married Marie Margaret Fleissner, and in 1895 their only child, Robert Granniss Cowan, was born. In that year Robert E. set up in business as a bookseller, occupying a number of locations until 1902, when his stock was moved to his residence on Treat Avenue. In 1897 part of the proceeds of the sale of his first Californiana collection were used to buy the stock of Patrick J. Healy, one of San Francisco's established booksellers. The elder Cowan was well known throughout the city as a bookseller, book collector, historian, speaker, and member of a number of social clubs, but lacked business acumen, Robert G. remarks, and funds were never too plentiful. Perhaps he was more

interested in collecting than selling.

As his knowledge of Californiana and his collection grew, Robert E. saw the need for a bibliography of the subject. He stressed this necessity in the late 1890s before the California Library Association, and later in a paper read before the American Historical Association and published in its journal. In conjunction with Dunlap Boutwell, he compiled and published in 1909 A Bibliography of the Chinese Question in the United States. In 1914 his Bibliography of the History of California and the Pacific West was published by the Book Club of California. This was a selective list of some 1,000 titles, and it made his reputation as a bibliographer. It was followed, almost twenty years later, by a much fuller Bibliography of California, 1510-1930, published in 1933. This work was for the most part a catalog of Cowan's collection, with additions, prepared under his direction by his son, Robert G. Cowan. About 5,000 titles were covered in this three-volume set, with a supplementary volume added by Robert G. in 1964. It is still the standard work in the field of Californiana.

Bookselling, particularly during the years of the First World War, was no more remunerative than ever, so when in 1919 Robert E. Cowan was offered the position of librarian by William Andrews Clark, Jr., of Los Angeles,

he was pleased to accept. Although he continued to deal in books and pamphlets for special customers, he officially ended his bookselling career in 1920.

As Mr. Clark's librarian, Cowan put to good use his bibliographical expertise, as he assisted with the preparation and supervised the printing (by John Henry Nash) of the catalogs of Clark's rapidly growing collections. For the first seven years of this association, Cowan divided his time between Los Angeles and San Francisco, where he maintained his residence. In 1926, with the completion of Clark's library building, a full-time librarian was wanted, and Clark requested that Cowan move to Los Angeles, where a house was provided for him. He remained in this position for another seven years, until in 1933 financial reverses impelled Mr. Clark to request his resignation.

Cowan, then seventy-one years old, remained in Los Angeles and continued his keen interest in California material. Having published his bibliography in 1933 he had no further need of his collection, which (as mentioned earlier) was sold to UCLA in 1936, although he had enough duplicates to keep him occupied. He died in 1942 with his reputation as the authority in his field firmly established and with the Cowan collection at UCLA to bear witness to how well he cultivated his chosen field over a period of more than forty years. In addition to the

three bibliographies already listed, he wrote The Bibliography of the Spanish Press in California (1919); Bibliographical Notes on Certain of the Earliest Editions of Bret Harte's Heathen Chinee (1934); Forgotten Characters of Old San Francisco (1937); Booksellers of Early San Francisco; with a Biography of the Author by Robert G. Cowan (1953).

* * *

Robert Granniss Cowan, born in 1895, was educated in the public schools of San Francisco. As a boy he experienced the earthquake and fire of 1906, but the fire did not reach the area in which the Cowan family lived. He had "no vocational goals," and after graduation from high school he worked for an uncle who had a jewelry business. When the United States entered the First World War he joined the coast guard in a unit which was later drafted into the army as the Army Artillery Park, a supply organization. The outfit saw service in France for a month before the Armistice.

After his return to San Francisco Robert G. was married to Georgia Harvey. They purchased a home in Oakland, and their two sons, George and William Alfred, were born there. When his father came to Los Angeles in 1926, the younger Cowan arranged for the packing and shipping

of Robert E. Cowan's library, a big undertaking (it weighed twenty tons). In Los Angeles he began the cataloging of his father's library, which developed into the Bibliography of California. This employment lasted from 1926 to 1933 and provided him with a broad knowledge of California history and the resources for its study.

With the completion of the bibliography, Robert G. opened a philatelic business, the LaCal Stamp Company, in downtown Los Angeles, which he operated until after his father's death in 1942. Then he let it go and bought and managed rental property until his retirement. In 1958 he joined the Southern California Historical Society, and he has been a very active member since that time. He has served several terms as a member of the board of directors, and he is currently librarian of the society.

In addition to his work on the 1933 bibliography, which included publication of a supplementary volume in 1964, Robert G. Cowan has been the author of: A Backward Glance; Los Angeles, 1901-1915; On the Rails of Los Angeles: a Pictorial History of Its Street-cars; Ranchos of California; a list of Spanish Concessions, 1775-1822, and Mexican Grants, 1822-1846 (1956); and The Admission of the 31st State by the 31st Congress; an Annotated Bibliography of Congressional Speeches upon the Admission of California (1962).

The interest in California history and bibliography begun by Robert Ernest Cowan in the 1880s and continued by Robert Granniss Cowan down to the present time has been a family affair for almost a century. Measured in terms of the accomplishments of father and son, it has been a fruitful interest for them, and for the scholars and librarians who have benefited from their endeavors.

William E. Conway

Los Angeles, California
June, 1979

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Joel Gardner, Senior Editor, UCLA Oral History Program. BA, MA, French, Tulane University; MA, Journalism, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Robert G. Cowan's home, 1650 Redcliff Street, Los Angeles. The video session was taped at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library.

Dates: May 18, June 2 [video session], 8, 1978.

Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of recording hours: Interviews were conducted in the morning. Each session varied in length, with an average of about an hour per taping. Three hours were recorded.

Persons present during interview: Cowan and Gardner. Rebecca Andrade operated the camera for the video session.

CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW:

The interview had two focuses: the life of the respondent and the career of his father, Robert E. Cowan. The elder Cowan was bibliographer for William Andrews Clark, Jr., and was greatly responsible for the development of his book collections. The younger Cowan worked with his father in the compilation of bibliographies, then produced several of his own.

Initial preparation consisted of seeking biographical information on Robert E. Cowan. His papers, housed in the UCLA Library's Department of Special Collections, provided a rich source and also re-created the background, San Francisco at the turn of the century. The interviewer then consulted the works of both Cowans.

Following the dual structure along a chronological line, the interviewer asked Mr. Cowan to recall his father's early bookselling experiences and his participation in the cultural life of San Francisco. He then sought information relative to the Clark Library, including early contacts with Clark as well as later relationships. Finally, the interview was

brought up to date with a discussion of the many historical and scholarly activities of both men.

EDITING:

Deborah Ann Young, Assistant Editor, Oral History Program, checked the verbatim transcript of the interview for accuracy, and edited it for punctuation, paragraphing, spelling, and verification of proper names. The final manuscript remains in the same order as the taped material. Words or phrases introduced by the editor have been bracketed.

Mr. Cowan reviewed and approved the edited transcript. He made minor corrections, few additions or deletions. He provided or confirmed spellings of names that had not been verified previously.

Deborah Young prepared the index. William Conway, former librarian of the Clark Library, wrote the introduction. Other front matter was assembled by Program staff.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings, video tape, and edited transcripts of the interview are in the University Archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of noncurrent records of the University.

Records relating to this interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

MAY 18, 1978

GARDNER: As I mentioned, I think we'll start off by discussing somewhat your family background, and what your father's life was like before he got to San Francisco, and what you know of your grandparents, and so on.

COWAN: We'll start with my grandfather [Robert Hawke Cowan], my father's father. He was born in Galway, Ireland, of an Irish mother [Elizabeth Hawke] and a Scottish father [Richard Cowan]. The father came from Edinburgh, landed in Dublin as an Episcopalian minister. Heaven knows how he got along, but he did. [laughter] Anyhow, he came from Galway after he was born and lived in Dublin until he was of age; he had two older brothers, half-brothers actually. Then he joined the army. And eventually he landed in the Kaffir War in South Africa, and he got wounded a couple of times down there. He was at the tail end of the Indian mutiny. He didn't see any service over there, but after the thing was settled when he got there--it took him nine months to get there from England on slow-sailing vessels, as usual--he came home by way of the Arabian desert. It was four days and four nights on camelback across the Arabian desert before he got to Alexandria, and then he sailed from there to England.

GARDNER: Is any of this written down anywhere? Did he record any of his adventures at all?

COWAN: My father did, yes. I was too young to record them myself when he died, but father recorded a lot of things, not such as this, but by written notes that I've gathered together. And my grandmother [Lydia Rebecca Peer] was born in Canada, in Markham or near Markham, which is near Hamilton and not too far from Niagara, and her folks came from Pennsylvania. Her grandfather [Stephen Peer] came with Wolfe at the siege of Quebec and landed eventually in Pennsylvania; and it's presumed that he was in the Revolution. I have some doubts about that, inasmuch as I think he was a Tory, and he got out of the Revolution and went to Canada and established a family there, where [my grandmother] was born. And her father [Stephen Peer] owned Lundy Lane, where, in the War of 1812, a battle was fought (the battle of Lundy Lane) on his property, and he was killed there at that time. He was defending his property. He was in the English army and defending his property, I guess, and he was killed there. Anyhow, grandfather came to America eventually, after having an upset with his family. His mother died and left a considerable estate--she was in the linen mills and there was a bit of money there--but the older brothers, half-brothers and no relation of hers, got the estate on account of her marriage.

So he cut off the family from then on; when they cut him off, [laughter], he came to America, and there's been no contact of our family with that family since.

GARDNER: Is that so?

COWAN: Yes. It's been cut off entirely, so I don't know anything about them. I don't know if any of them ever came to America or not.

GARDNER: It was just completely closed off?

COWAN: Just slammed the door. And he came over here and thrashed around for a while and wanted to get into the Union army during the Civil War. And he went to the recruiting office, and he saw them throwing men up in blankets; well, that wasn't for him, so he decided he wasn't going to join the American army. [laughter] And then he came to California to dig gold--before the Civil War period; he came in the late fifties to dig for gold. He didn't make any attempt to establish himself here at that time; then after he married, almost immediately after he was married, he came to California. He left his wife in Markham, and father and his older sister [Annie] were born there.

GARDNER: In Canada?

COWAN: Yes. And then grandfather called for his wife to come out to California and establish themselves. She left the children there with a grandaunt and uncle. And the children were sent out after the measles in a wintery

snowstorm, and they both almost lost the sight of their eyes. My father could only see out of one eye, actually, and the other was so nearsighted it was microscopic; he'd always take his glasses off and hold an object about two inches away from his eyes so he could see it, as if he wanted to use it as a microscope.

GARDNER: And that was the result of measles.

COWAN: That was a result of being out in the snow after the measles. His mother came out to California sometime in the middle sixties, and by 1870 she went back and gathered up the children and came out here. So father came out on the first transcontinental railroad about a year after it was opened up in 1870, and [my family] established themselves in San Francisco in the Mission District, because that has the nicest climate. And grandfather, although he might have been a medical graduate from Dublin College (he set up a business as a doctor), we would call him a quack doctor today because he dealt in herbs and corns and one thing or another. But anyhow, he's known as Doctor Cowan, always. And he evidently had some background and made pretty good money for the time, and so forth; so he bought property around Twentieth and Treat Avenue, which is in the Mission District. And instead of going up to Mission Street or any of the commercial streets (he didn't like that), he just bought residential property in around the Twentieth

and Treat Avenue vicinity. Then father went to medical college for two years and couldn't take that--it wasn't his bit at all. But in the meantime, after reading his first book on bees when he was five years of age, he established himself in the book field. He had gathered a library, and his father never denied the fact that books were fine for the education, but that's all they were good for; they weren't good for business. So when father got out of the medical college he went to work for Waldteufel, who was a music dealer, first in San Jose and then San Francisco, who also carried Catholic art goods. Father was in the music department there. Of course, there are a few stories about irate priests that came in on the wrong bill, and so forth, and told Waldteufel he was being a Jew; but he married a Catholic, so that established him in that business quite well. The priest had said they were very short of holy water when he was baptized. [laughter] And then after that, father started the book business.

GARDNER: I wrote down Lowell-Toland Medical College--what was that?

COWAN: It was a medical college. It's now the affiliated colleges in San Francisco. It was all medicine at that time, just one building. I don't know whether the area's the same now. I think that Toland was more in town than the affiliated college; of course, that's in the middle of

San Francisco now, but I don't think it was in that area. I'm not sure.

GARDNER: But he did two years there.

COWAN: Yes, uh-huh.

GARDNER: Had he already started involving himself in the gathering of books before then? You mentioned that it started when he was small and he read the book on bees. Had he done any dealing, or was he just buying?

COWAN: No dealing, no. He established a library--it was more or less of a reading library up till probably the late 1880s--and then his interest became more aimed at Californiana, and he started collecting then.

GARDNER: Do you know how that interest first came about?

COWAN: Just automatically, I suppose, with father. I don't think he had many contacts at all that would take him in that area. Then he got into the book business on his own after collecting a lot of Californiana. His major collection of manuscripts came from Halleck, Peachey, and Billings, the most famous law firm in California. Colonel [George W.] Granniss folded up the office for Halleck, Peachey, and Billings because [Henry W.] Halleck went into the Civil War and Billings went up to Billings, Montana, which was named after him; he was more interested in that than he was in the law business in San Francisco. And I think [Archibald] Peachey died. That left the firm high and dry. And Granniss

was around all through the office period, the later office period, and he was in charge of the Montgomery block at that time and saw to it that all the papers and stuff were thrown out or disposed of one way or another. Father made his acquaintance somewhere along the line, and he was given a tremendous amount of manuscripts that eventually went to Berkeley before the Bancroft Library was there. They were purchased by Collis P. Huntington as a gift for the library in Berkeley.

GARDNER: Do you know how they originally got together? Was it just the chance of a book buyer and bookseller that your father met Colonel Granniss?

COWAN: No, father had little or no business acumen, but he knew the papers were there, so he made his acquaintance in a sociable way.

GARDNER: I see.

COWAN: So sociable that I got the name from Granniss; that's my middle name. And Granniss bought me my first suit of clothes. And also, in reference to the papers that father got from him, and also Granniss's liking for the family, well, I got the name.

GARDNER: What was Colonel Granniss like? Do you recall him? It's a long way back, I know, but . . .

COWAN: I don't remember him at all.

GARDNER: Even with that first suit of clothes? [laughter]

COWAN: That's right; there are other things I can remember. I think I wore that first suit of clothes to have my tonsils taken out--by electricity at that time, believe it or not! That was 1902 or -3, somewhere in there, or maybe before. Oh, it must have been before.

GARDNER: So your father would have gone into the book business then in the late 1880s, I would guess. Did he just sort of hang a shingle out and say, "I'm going in the book business"?

COWAN: No, he started gathering, but he didn't hang a shingle out until he had sold the collection to Huntington. He bought Healy's store on Powell Street--Patrick J. Healy. He's a little squat Irishman about so high [indicates height] but hefty and strong as all get out. And he had his way around, and he got into the anti-Chinese movement and made speeches, and so forth, until one day he switched sides and was thrown out of the anti-Chinese movement. [laughter] And he got involved in the Mercantile library, I believe, and so forth. And, of course, father by that time was in and out of shops around San Francisco and Healy couldn't stay put very long. He had several shops; this first one that father bought out was on Powell Street; and then I don't know where Healy went, and father moved to Fourth Street near Mission; and then he bought out Healy again on Mission Street. [laughter]

GARDNER: I know I have this long list of addresses for shops. Was that usual in those days, that bookdealers move?

COWAN: No, no.

GARDNER: It was just your father's expansion of business, I suppose.

COWAN: Probably a matter of rent more than anything.

GARDNER: At the time that he got into that business. Well, in Los Angeles at that time there would have been a handful of booksellers--maybe two or three. Were there a lot of booksellers in San Francisco, or was it a fairly open market for them?

COWAN: Oh, yes, there were many established by that time.

GARDNER: Is that so?

COWAN: Yes, small and large. The Holmes Co. I think is 1890. And there's [William M.] McDevitt, whose name I tried to mention the other night and forgot; [laughter] he was a socialist. And then the King brothers and a couple of women--Miss Libby and others mentioned in The Booksellers of Early San Francisco. Father at that time would generally spend all afternoon rummaging around in bookshops to find out what he could find. And they learned afterwards that father knew more than they did about Californiana; so whatever he bought, he'd have to take two or three odd things that didn't mean a thing to him and stack them in between

the thing that he wanted, so they wouldn't know what thing it was that he wanted, so they wouldn't deny him the sale! [laughter] Which they did before.

GARDNER: I noticed by going through the files that there were many ways in which he purchased books, but would you say that he got most of his books in those days, in the early days, by going around to the different shops and buying there? Or did he have contacts all around and about?

COWAN: He bought them anywhere and everywhere. He had a lot of contacts in Europe, bookdealers in Europe--he bought from catalogs. There was Thorpe in England and Lange in Italy. Thorpe, incidentally, sent catalogs to father and myself for about seventy years before it was cut off. And, of course, I bought very little from Thorpe because he didn't have anything of my interest. They kept on sending them until just a few years ago.

GARDNER: Let's take a sideward move here: I have down that he married your mother [Marie Fleissner Cowan] in 1894, and then I guess you were born not long afterwards. Can you tell us something about your own early childhood? Tell when you were born and something about your mother as well.

COWAN: My mother came from a very musical family. Her older sister [Minna Fleissner-Lewis] was a singer quite

renowned around the Sacramento area; in fact, there's broadsides still existent [of her] as a top opera singer in some of the opera companies up there. Her oldest brother [Otto Fleissner] taught music to the blind in Berkeley for fifty years before he retired. And the other two brothers--one [Hugo] played the flute and the other [Gustave] the violin. The other sister [Hermine Fleissner Winks] could go to an opera or a musical and could come home and play the whole thing on the piano without hesitation. They were musically involved that much, and my mother herself played the piano and sang. Well, this older sister of mother's went to Waldteufel's bookshop to buy some music, and she met this nice young man behind the counter; and she decided that her sister should meet this man. So he was invited to [the Fleissner] house (her name was Fleissner) for dinner, and this thing jelled; and after two years, why, they married. They married in 1894, and I was born a year and one month afterwards.

GARDNER: What was the date of your birth? That's one of those things we like to include in the record.

COWAN: On December 14, 1895. During this period, while he was courting mother, they saw an awful lot of the mid-winter fair in San Francisco. Then they were married, and they established themselves in one of grandfather's

dwellings at Twentieth and Treat Avenue, which, from all points of view, even at that time was quite hideous. [laughter] But I guess they got rent free for a while.

GARDNER: In what way was it hideous?

COWAN: It was old at that time.

GARDNER: Oh, even then.

COWAN: It was one of the houses that was a racetrack house at one time. It had a very peculiar second floor; it seemed that the second floor was a gallery at the time it opened up. And by the time I came along, the gallery was floored over, and there was nothing left but seemingly rooms surrounding the gallery. It wasn't in that building I was born--I was born in the one next door. And then from there he moved to 819 Treat Avenue near Twenty-second and paid rent to a man who had--we called them flats, but they weren't really flats. They were just two stories with a basement as the first floor. And we lived there for about two years, and then there was the possibility of getting a house two doors away that was owned by grandfather again. By this time grandfather died, but grandmother owned the property, so he inveigled grandmother into disposing of the tenants over there, and father moved in. And every once in a while he paid the rent, if and when he could. [laughter] And while we were at this first residence at 819 Treat Avenue (owned by somebody else, a stranger), he

closed the shop downtown and moved his entire stock into the basement of that place. And then it was moved a couple of years later into 867 Treat Avenue.

GARDNER: The first one was 819 Treat?

COWAN: It was 819, then later to 867. From then on the stock was never touched except in and outs in the basement until 1926. And I packed the thing up and sent it down to Los Angeles, twenty tons of it, and about twenty tons were disposed of.

GARDNER: We'll do that in more detail when we get up to 1926.

COWAN: I'd like to go back again and give some of the background during the period that he was in business.

GARDNER: Yes, that's what I mean. We'll do 1926 later on when we get to it. I'd like to hear some more, before we go on, about your father; something about your own memories of childhood; what it was like growing up around Treat; what the family life was like. Obviously the family at that point was close to Dr. Cowan, your grandfather--what were things like around the Cowan household?

COWAN: Well, it was at the center of an Irish community, and the Cowans were all regarded as aristocrats, and we had to fight our way. [laughter] It was hideous. The Cowan family lived at 711 Treat Avenue, which is around the corner from Twentieth Street, in a three-story house.

And on each side they had Irish neighbors, and they fought with all of them all the time, even to knocking broomsticks at each other, and so forth. [laughter] And they didn't have any social life in San Francisco in that area, and it kind of divorced the Cowans to themselves. But father was a lot more sociable, going around to the booksellers and meeting people and eventually joining certain institutions like the Philatelic Club and the 6:30 Club and the [San Francisco] Library Association; why, he got to meet many people and went to dinners and so forth. He was secretary of the Philatelic Society for a dozen years, and he met people like Henry Crocker and a lot of outstanding citizens that belonged there. And the 6:30 Club was a marvelous institution from my point of view. It was comprised of many literary people--I can only remember two or three. Frederick J. Teggart of the University of California was one of the outstanding members; and Koenig--I think he was involved in business on Montgomery--and several others of very high mental quality. And this club was established for the mere purpose of going there, having dinner, reading a paper, and then everybody tearing the paper to pieces after dinner! [laughter] No paper came out of there unscathed. If the author of the paper couldn't stand it, he resigned. And the papers were all in the abstract. Father wrote a paper, and it was presented there--it was

on philanthropy or some such title, entirely abstract--and, of course, that was torn to pieces like the rest of them after dinner. But it was marvelous. And then finally the club folded; it lasted about ten, twelve years, something of that sort. For a while father was secretary of that.

GARDNER: So he stayed active in lots of things.

COWAN: The things he was interested in. But he wasn't a joiner; he never joined any lodges or things of that kind. The things that were in his category of thinking he would join for the purpose which helped his business in a lot of ways--like meeting George Haviland Barron, who was the curator of the De Young Museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. He met him probably shortly after the fire in San Francisco. Father had social talents; he could talk well. He was invited over and over again to the Canadian House of the midwinter fair and which was behind the museum, and it was still used for residential purposes for the curator at the time. I was an only child, and it was very seldom I was left behind. Barron about once a month, at least for a dozen years, had dinner parties, and about a dozen people would go there, and you'd meet anybody and everybody there. He'd have politicians there, and he had the plumber at one time. [laughter] And he'd have European travelers and he'd have scholars and people that

visited the museum, and if he liked them, he'd invite them for dinner; so you got all kinds of people there. But Barron was one of our greatest impromptu after-dinner speakers that California's ever had, I think, because he was a spellbinder. He could tell stories, sometimes historical, and sometimes the history got very twisted, according to how he wanted to promote the story. It didn't make any difference, because listening for two minutes you forgot all about history and everything else. You were so involved in his method of telling, his dynamic appearance--he was a very tall man with flowing white hair, not long, and a white moustache which imitated the last kaiser's moustache (points up on the ends, and so forth) and he had a very military bearing and was very precise in his language. He'd been born into the Spanish language, I think, because he could handle the Spanish language like a native, as well as English. And he was well educated--I don't know where, but he was well educated. But he was a thriller. And he had these dinner engagements, and after dinner everybody--even myself, the ten- or twelve-year-older--had to get up and give an after-dinner talk. And I was the only youngster in the crowd, over and over again. Father met many people that way, to promote his name more than anything else, because he never talked books unless somebody was interested. It was anything else and everything

else he would speak of. Some of our tops down here found out the same thing. Like Larry Powell used to come and visit the house very often, and on account of father's scholarly attainments, they didn't talk books much. [laughter]

Then this Barron--they traveled around together. Father had two close friends; one of them was [Frederick I.] Monsen, who came along before I did, and they traveled around together.

GARDNER: Who was he? What did he do?

COWAN: He was a photographer and a lecturer. And he traveled: he went to the Moqui Snake Dance, and he did that on slides and lectured on slides; and he went with father up to Portland and Seattle on a picture-taking expedition, and they had various episodes up there. And Monsen and Barron were the real friends, and that was it. He had hundreds of acquaintances, of course. And almost every day, after business hours, they'd meet downtown and run the cocktail route for an hour or so and then come home. [laughter] They met a lot of top characters down there. They weren't all saloon hangers-on or anything of that sort, because the cocktail was a way for politicians to go to establish themselves, and they met the tops of the aristocracy of San Francisco--male, of course. So his contact with Barron did a great deal of good for him

because he met many people. And then Barron would get him to talk, and that brought him before the people also. For instance, Barron had him talk at the laying of the foundation, I think it was, of the De Young Museum, and there was quite a gathering there--a couple of thousand people, I think, from the looks of the pictures that I've seen. I was there, but I don't remember much about it, except that I listened to father and I didn't know what he said. [laughter] And those kinds of occasions that Barron steered him into broadened father, and it broadened his name also.

GARDNER: You were obviously placed right in the middle of this circle then, from a very early age.

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: You were taken along to all the functions, and so on and so forth.

COWAN: Quite true. I think I got most of my education there--if I have any! [laughter]

GARDNER: Did you then have any interest in the book business at that early age? As a youngster going around from function to function and seeing what your father was doing, was there an interest for you in that? What was it like for you?

COWAN: No, because it was seldom that books were ever mentioned.

GARDNER: I see.

COWAN: Judge Treadwell in San Francisco, one of the people that went to Barron's parties, had parties, and I also remember going there; I was the only youngster there. I can remember it was 1912, and we burned an effigy of 1912 in alcohol on the table, [laughter] which I thought was great. And the effigy consisted of a block of wood about eight inches long, dressed as an officer in the Austrian army, very much decorated. Well, he was burned at twelve o'clock New Year's Eve. And those kinds of things stuck in my memory. But the talk was of a general nature; there wasn't anything bookish about it at all, because at Barron's house and at Judge Treadwell's house and at other houses, there were few book people, actually. And, of course, I never went to the library association meetings or anything of that sort. I was packed off to my grandmother's to stay for the night, and I never got in at those where they did talk books. My only exposure to books was in the basement of our house, and I used the rooms to play hide-and-go-seek in with my friends. And I always got in trouble because invariably stacks of magazines and books would be knocked over, and then father would know it the next morning, and then I was in trouble. [laughter] That's my exposure to books to begin with.

GARDNER: What were your interests early on, then? What

sort of things when you were a kid growing up?

COWAN: Oh, I got interested, not in collecting books--although I always had books and read a lot all of my life.

GARDNER: You would have had to. [laughter]

COWAN: Yes, I was taken by the nose. And I didn't begin by reading particularly trash. My first book that I read was Chalou's In Equatorial Africa, which gave you a very good picture of Africa at that time; it's considerably changed. And then my next book was Froissart's England, France and Spain, which was a considerable history. Those were the first two books that I read. And then I got to reading history; history is more interesting to me, if it's nicely presented, than fiction. Although I've read a lot of fiction too, beginning with Dickens up and Dickens down, as far as fiction is concerned. So I always had a library of sorts, you know, a general reading library. When father actually moved and came down here, then I began getting very much interested in California, because I'd handled his library down here and then got into the bibliography bit, which was first cataloging his library, and then at my suggestion it was converted to a bibliography. There wasn't any conversion because he set me up and told me how to proceed with the cataloging of the library in bibliographical style, which was done. So about the middle of the thing, it was decided that we should offer it somewhere

for publication, and eventually Nash took it on; it didn't do us any good financially--there were only 600 copies issued.

GARDNER: This was what, 1919, '20?

COWAN: In 1933 it came along.

GARDNER: Oh that's the '33 one! Oh, right, the Clark one was the first one.

COWAN: No, the first one was the [Bibliography of the] Spanish Press [in California], and it's been through various publications; and the next one was the [Bibliography of the] Chinese Question [in the United States]; and the Bibliography [of the History of California and] the Pacific [West], which isn't a bibliography in the sense that the California was, because the bibliography of the Pacific Coast only is a thousand titles of top quality of the whole Pacific Coast, not exclusively California. But the latest bibliography [Bibliography of California, 1510-1930] is exclusively California in its entirety.

GARDNER: Well, when you were growing up then, here you are surrounded by people involved in books and also surrounded by this other community. Did you have any kind of vocational goals as a teenager? I mean, did you think to yourself, "I'm going to be a railroad engineer"? What were your thoughts?

COWAN: No, I was floundering around the same as my father,

I guess. [laughter] Oh, of course there were first goals; I wanted to be a dentist or something of that sort, and then that moved out of the picture eventually. That was after I got to go to the dentist a few times. I didn't like his operations at all, because they had a foot pedal for a drill, and it got stuck in my teeth and all those kind of things which weren't very comfortable, so I didn't like that. And then about the time I graduated from high school, my uncle [Gustave Fleissner] induced me to be errand boy for his jewelry business. [portion inadvertently erased]

It was a small, nicely appointed office on the second floor across Post Street from Shreve & Co. Most of the business came from wealthy women desiring something special, mostly in rings or brooches. He would make a crude sketch of what was wanted, in size and shape of the mounting and the stone or stones. I would be called upon to pick up a selection of at least four or more sapphires and/or diamonds. (The mode of the day called for diamonds and sapphires mounted on platinum.) All things decided, the sketch would be turned over to an artist, who would come up with a perfect, colored drawing of the unique filigree work with all the details. After the customer's acceptance it would be taken to a manufacturing jeweler. I do not believe that cost was ever discussed. Once I made a delivery to Mrs. Phoebe Hearst,

a very gracious lady, who was living at the Fairmont Hotel.

This uncle was a slave driver. From nine to six o'clock with no breaks save the lunch hour. If I wasn't on an errand, I had to clean rings, wrap packages (with absolute precision), and, during the interims, polish the silverware. He had an Apperson Jack-rabbit automobile, about a 1914 model, which I serviced for him. I drove this car after learning which foot pedal was the brake or the clutch and which were the correct positions of the gearshift. There was no one to show me. Driver's licenses were not heard of until later. The first ones issued were supposed to be permanent, but they canceled out a few years after.

The other uncle, my father's brother [Elbert Cowan], was a musician. He was the leader of the Hotel Oakland orchestra for twenty-five years, and he could pick up any stringed instrument and play it like a professional--well, he was a professional. My operation was mainly the jewelry business. And then World War I took twenty-two months out of my life, and I came back and was in the jewelry business for a very short time. And then I met my wife, and through her connivance I got a job with Dill-Crosett, an importer and exporter; they did more importing than exporting. That was through the W.P. Fuller Co., where my wife worked. The company imported all kinds of dry paints and chemicals,

Japanese articles, food, almost everything around the world. So I got involved in that, until they folded two years later. I was at that time in the Japanese importing department, so I went out on the road and sold, I think it was, ninety bales of grass rugs, which were very popular at that time. I loaded Sloan's with all I could sell them, and then I went on the road to sell, and that was the finish of the business. [laughter] I sold their stock out.

GARDNER: Your father never encouraged you before the later period to get into the book business?

COWAN: No, he never tried to induce me or encourage me or discourage me--he never had anything to say about it.

GARDNER: Well, you made this comment in your history of booksellers, I think, your chapter on him. I wrote down: " . . . funds were never too plentiful." And then Henry Wagner had the great comment about how they got started in their relationship as bookseller and bookbuyer: "He needed money more than books, and I needed books more than money." Which I think is an interesting way of putting it. Did you ever feel the pinch as you were growing up?

COWAN: Oh, yes!

GARDNER: Really!

COWAN: Oh, yes. It was a comfortable day when two dollars came in. Mother got one dollar, and father took

care of all the expenses--the bills, the rent, and everything else--from the other dollar. The dollar that mother got was for food and household operations, and so forth; that included clothing, too, so there wasn't much left, you know.

GARDNER: And yet he seems to have led a life of some elegance, with the clubs and the society, and so forth and so on.

COWAN: That's what everybody thought, [laughter] but it wasn't true! They learned how to live, and they lived very well--no case of starving or anything of that sort--on the small amount that did come in.

GARDNER: Did your grandfather have an inheritance or anything like that?

COWAN: Yes, he left it all to his wife and his two unmarried daughters, so the married children didn't get anything. And there wasn't much to leave; it was just the property, which they had to hold for their income. As a matter of fact, that was the only income they had. But outside of that, there was no other estate, just this property.

GARDNER: This is kind of an obligatory question, I suppose: What about the earthquake? The earthquake-fire took place in what? 1905, '06?

COWAN: In 1906.

GARDNER: How did they affect you, and how did they affect the business, if at all?

COWAN: Well, it affected me by shaking me out of bed, [laughter] number one. And we had to get out of our house on account of the fire came within four or five blocks of the house. We lived in a friend's basement up on the side of Twin Peaks for the three days following, and so forth. It didn't affect father's business; it promoted it rather than defect it, although he lost a box of valuable books down in Holmes's basement. He was careless about leaving things around that way, and they were burned up, of course. But after the fire, all the libraries in the area--both the public libraries and the private libraries--needed building up, so father was right there with the stock, because all his life he bought a good deal more than he could afford to, and he had quite a backlog more than he could sell. One of the rooms in the cottage at 867 Treat Avenue was devoted to books entirely; it was called "the back bedroom," the back parlor. That was shut off from the rest of the house, and it was a book room, lined with books. That was his library; and when all the collectors would come to the house, that was the room they were in. You wouldn't go down to the basement at all because his stock was downstairs, but his library was upstairs. All the book collectors --[Augustine] MacDonald of Richmond, Wagner, [Allen] Knight,

[Fred] Zimmerman, Bonestell, and Graupner--they all would come upstairs into this room, and he'd let them go through it and pick out what they want, and he'd put a price on it. It was always a satisfactory price because father was never high, and that was the reason all his collectors stuck to him until he got into the Clark Library, actually, or until they had their fill of books. Like MacDonald--he sold his to the Huntington Library, the sale of which was engineered by father. Father got three lots on Central Avenue as commission from Huntington, and that was the only commission he got, which he had to liquidate right away. [laughter]

GARDNER: What was a typical day like for him in those days when you were growing up?

COWAN: He spent his mornings answering correspondence or in the basement sorting out magazines for articles, Bret Harte articles, out of The Overland, or putting them in order. Or if he got an order for something, he'd go down and dig them up and set it up, and so forth, ship it out, and then go and get an expressman--he always had a favorite expressman, who generally charged him anywhere from fifty cents to a dollar and a half for the job of transporting the books here and there and bringing them into the basement. And then in the afternoon he'd take off for the bookshops and then come home by the cocktail route, always at six o'clock, precisely at six o'clock. And mother and I

always sat in the window for him; he'd turn the corner at six o'clock, and that was it. [laughter]

GARDNER: Your mother must have had a great deal of patience . . .

COWAN: She did.

GARDNER: . . . given the circumstances.

COWAN: Yes, well, mother was from the old school, and father was the king of the house, and that was it. She had to have patience, although when she blew--[laughter] father didn't blow it; he gentlemanly absorbed it. He let her have her way, but she didn't demand her way very often--very, very seldom, unless it was something very vital. The rest of the time father always had his way. We always went out on Sundays, that was family day. Nothing interfered with that. Our outing generally consisted of going to a certain part of San Francisco by streetcar--we didn't have any other means of transportation--for a nickel apiece, and walk. It might have been downtown, or it might have been the dumps, or it might have been the pesthouse, or anywhere else, or just a certain section of San Francisco, residential and business. And we'd generally end up in the Latin Quarter for dinner at about two to three o'clock in the afternoon. There weren't any crowds there at that time, and dinner was very comfortable and very inexpensive--fifty cents on Sundays and thirty-five cents during the week, which is a seven-

course dinner. It started with a bowl of soup; then the salad; then a bit of chicken, a leg or a small portion of breast of chicken; and then fish (no, the fish came before the chicken); and then the entree, roast beef or something of that sort. And then for dessert it was always banana fritters or fried cream and then a bowl of fruit and a split of wine and a demitasse coffee, fifty cents, and five cents for the waiter. [laughter] So the dollar for that day--well, it was a little more, a dollar and a half--went for that outing. Should we stay home on Sunday, dinner was invariably a twenty-five-cent cut of cross-rib. The butcher would cut a piece that he considered the proper size, but he would never weigh it. There were no pennies in circulation, so there was no object in weighing it. You had asked for twenty-five cents' worth, and that's what you got. This roast would last the three of us at least two days. And then in the evening at home during the week we would go for a walk around the neighborhood. The neighborhoods were a lot different then; it was very, very safe to go around the neighborhoods. There was one man that stood under a particular lamppost every evening for six years to my knowledge and was never molested at any time--not on account of his size, but because nobody would ever think of bothering another person on the streets. Light or dark, it didn't make any difference. He was a character; he stood

under the same lamppost for years . . .

GARDNER: What was he doing under the lamppost?

COWAN: Nothing, just standing there. [laughter] He greeted everybody that came along. His name was John Pryor.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

MAY 18, 1978

GARDNER: As I just mentioned, the first bibliography that I have any record of is 1914, and you were about to describe to me what that was.

COWAN: It was a Bibliography of the History of California and the Pacific [West]. It was comprised of 1,000 titles of that area and there were just the most historically valuable things that could be gathered up and put into this. It wasn't an overall picture of the scene at all; it was simply a catalog of outstanding books--rare, expensive, and also historically valuable.

GARDNER: Was there any story behind putting the bibliography together?

COWAN: No, father had always made notes along the line. He visited and viewed Vallejo's library up there and then he was always involved with Bancroft. And, in fact, long before Bancroft Library was moved to Berkeley, when it was still in Bancroft's hands, I went with father on a couple of Sundays; he had access to the library any Sunday that he went over there, and he took me a few times. I met [Hubert H.] Bancroft a couple of times. I can remember he looked like [Venustiano] Carranza, with his back to a sunlit window. I could not distinguish his face but he could see me, and that's why I say Carranza, because Carranza did

that. He admonished me to be a good boy and all that. But father had the access there, and he always went there to take notes; he made notes right from the time he became interested in Californiana; anything that passed through his hands, he made a note of. So he worked those notes out into bibliographical forms, and that was the background of his bibliographies.

For this he chose 1,000 most important books and some of them were put into that because that's as far as the Book Club [of California] wanted him to go, I believe, as far as space was concerned. But father didn't have any idea of creating these things himself; he had to be pushed into everything.

Before that time was the Bibliography of the Spanish Press [in California], and I think that John Howell induced him to do that. And then before that, the Chinese question --Boutwell Dunlap wanted to make a name for himself, I think, and pushed father into doing all the work on the bibliography for the Chinese question. From what I gather, Dunlap didn't know anything about bibliography or the Chinese question either, although he was the Argentinian counsel at San Francisco at that time (and he saved me stamps, which I was quite involved with at that time). But he was a great big, heavy man; he must have weighed close to 300 pounds. He was on crutches, too, all the

time that I knew him. He was a great eater, because the one afternoon it was late and father invited him to dinner, we only had a half a slice of round steak for dinner; which did our family--it cost ten cents for a half-slice. And he came to dinner, and mother didn't know it, so she hadn't prepared for him. He had to go out and buy a dinner after he ate what he could at our place. [laughter] He was quite voracious, I think, in his appetite.

GARDNER: That takes us up to the world war. You mentioned that you spent twenty-two months in the service. Can you tell me something about where they sent you?

COWAN: Yes, well, thirty-three days after United States declared war on Germany, I joined the coast guard. I had no formal training; I just marched around close to twelve-inch mortars at the armory at Fourteenth and Valencia in San Francisco. I was there until they drafted us as a unit into the regular army. I never saw boot camp; we were trained by that time and had enough sense to accomodate ourselves because it was a social organization. I knew some of the fellows in there, and I didn't know where to go, and I wanted to join something to keep out of the army, to keep from going to Europe (which I didn't). [laughter] But, anyhow, that was the idea. Well, I didn't mind going there, but my girlfriend and my mother and father, of

course, they didn't want me to go to Europe, naturally. So I joined this and so forth. But we got all our training down at Fourteenth and Valencia, and then we were drafted into the army, and we spent months at Fort Scott training on the big guns. And then they found out that I could run a typewriter, and I guess I was the only one in the company (well, there was another fellow that ran the typewriter, too), so I got into the office, and I was in the office all the way through the war. I didn't have to worry about mess lines; I didn't have to stand in a mess line in all that time. It was very nice. [laughter] Then we were sent to Utah on guard duty, and that was a joy for all of us because all we had to do was stand guard.

GARDNER: What were you guarding in Utah?

COWAN: Well, our outfit was split up into three parts--four parts, I guess; some of them were sent up to Boise, Idaho (I don't know what they were doing up there); our major portion was sent to Garfield, Utah, and we guarded Tooele, where there were mines, with some of the outfit. And at Garfield they had the smelters, and in Bingham was where the big mines are; and we did guard duty for all of those places. I was stationed at Garfield all the time, and I, being musically inclined right from the start on account of family background, I suppose--my nose was stuck into the piano keys and then in the violin and so forth,

and it didn't take (I joined the glee club in high school and sang bel basso profundo)--I organized a quartet in the army up in Utah, and we began singing up there. And we had a very good quartet. In fact, the captain, who had gotten involved with one of the girls at a Catholic church and was trying to show himself off, had our quartet sing at a Christmas mass up there. And this quartet was comprised of a Jew and an atheist and a Catholic and myself, who was Protestant. And we sang, so that didn't make any difference. [laughter] Anyhow, we weren't asked again because we weren't up there for the next Christmas, but they wouldn't have invited us anyhow. But, anyhow, that was the quartet, and that was how the quartet got started, and we stuck all through the war with this quartet.

Then after the guard duty, well, there was one episode where somebody rolled a barrel of hard cider down the middle of our lane, which was comprised of kinds of shacks, up at Garfield. So everybody caught wind of it and we packed our canteens on post--we were spending four hours on post and eight hours off of post at that time--and we got onto this hard cider business. Instead of putting water in our canteens, we put hard cider into our canteens, and the guard duty was wonderful! [laughter] I was sent some Christmas cookies from home--this was New Year's Eve--so I passed them around and, oh, we had a lovely time on guard

duty. Of course, we were stuck in sentry boxes that weren't warm but they did shield us against the climate up there. They had snow on the ground all the time; in Tooele we had three feet of snow all the time, which was rather tough. We couldn't drive jeeps, even. That was awkward also. And up at Bingham they didn't have as much snow, and most of the outfit was up there on account of the extent of the mines. Bingham at that time was just a one-street town with houses on either side, and it was rather uproarious.

And one celebration we went up there for a dance, and the cook in our outfit loaded our coffee, or some portion of the food, with saltpeter, or something of that sort, which gave us the Montezuma trots all evening. And we went up there by train, which is very slow going because it's all uphill; it ran about four or five miles an hour, I think. We'd have to get off the train and then run and catch up with it afterwards. And up there, every once in a while we'd be dancing with some girl and a fellow'd have a funny look on his face and drop her in the middle of his dance and rush off to the restroom. [laughter]

Well, then we were sent back to Fort Scott again. Eventually (we didn't do much except march around) we moved from Fort Scott into barracks at the Presidio, and we were drafted at that time by the regular army as an unusual unit. It was a regiment comprised of 1,000 men;

we were called the Army Artillery Park, which consisted of three park batteries, supposedly about 250 men each, and six truck companies. The Army Artillery Park established ammunition dumps for the artillery--sometimes in front of the artillery, sometimes behind it, but always in the vicinity. And the truck company operation is obvious; they carried the shells to and from the dumps. That was our operation in France.

GARDNER: Oh, so you got to Europe; that's what I was going to ask.

COWAN: Yes, well, on our way to Europe--we left to go to New York on the Santa Fe. We had a boat pick us up at the Presidio, and the quartet was on the rail singing to all the parents down below. We sang "There's a Long, Long Trail a-Winding." Well, that was a tearjerker; everybody on the docks cried, and even some of the fellows on deck cried, [laughter] especially the sailors. And we got to New York and we used the quartet there. One place we got to, a YMCA place in New York, they were supposed to entertain us; but by the time it was over, we were entertaining them by the quartet. And I met Painless Parker's sisters and daughters in New York. They were all married, and they took us under their wing. There were three or four of us that were taken in by three or four of them. And they took us all over Brooklyn, particularly, and Coney

Island, New York, and elsewhere to entertain us for the week, or couple of weeks, that we were in New York. Painless Parker was an established advertising dentist here in Los Angeles and probably, in California, the most-known dentist of the time.

GARDNER: That's a wonderful name, Painless Parker. [laughter]

COWAN: Yes, nice alliteration. And anyhow, we left on the Kroonland from New York, which is the sister of the Finland. And I kept a diary, which was forbidden because I was in the office, and I went with the office records, and my diary went with the office records. Well, if the Germans captured our office records, they'd know more about our outfit than the diary could ever give them because it was all personal in the diary. And I had this diary aboard ship, which started from the time I left San Francisco and had the various episodes. We were shot at, at sea, a couple of times by torpedoes--one going forward in front of us, one going aft. And another itme, we were almost stalled, and we didn't catch the torpedo, though it was awfully close--about thirty feet away from us. Then we were stalled a couple of times, and we got about halfway over and welcomed the British army and ran our flanks on either side, destroyers all around us. And every once in a while, one of the ships would break down, and they'd leave a destroyer behind with us or the other ship that had broken

down till we got to France. We did break down just before we got to France, and we left the convoy. We never saw the convoy again; we got to France before they did. We took a more direct route through the submarine zone, I presume. But we did land at St. Nazaire, which I don't think was used very much at that time for troop landing. We were not the first to land at St. Nazaire. From St. Nazaire we were shippped out to Chalus, which is close to Limoges, where all the great pottery comes from, including Haviland china. About thirty miles from Limoges, Chalus is. They'd never had American soldiers before, and we were treated royally.

GARDNER: About what were the dates at this time, do you remember? This would have been early 1918?

COWAN: Yes, in June, because we celebrated Fourth of July right after landing at St. Nazaire in 1918, and then we were taken by trains. We spent about three months in Chalus, more or less. And then we had our own trucks, of course, because our own truck company engineered us to the front. And we had episodes because we were along, and very often we were entirely alone because the office force was separate. We had all of the special duty sergeants along with the two battery clerks on this truck. It was loaded with clothing and everything, which made nice beds; so we slept inside most of the time, although the truck was

open. We didn't have any cover over the truck, so in inclement weather we had to find somewhere else, or else sleep in the rain. And we'd get stalled and get away from the outfit. We knew where we were going but that's all we did know. We'd stop off at a likely-looking farmhouse at night in a little village. The French farmers live in little villages, and the farms are on the outskirts of the villages and are one or two acres apiece. And we got to learn the French people and their way of life by living with these farmers; we'd take their family fare, whatever it was at that time. When we got near the front, we had to turn the lights off in the vehicle (it was a Pierce-Arrow truck, one of the big heavy ones with nine men in it besides the load), and we couldn't find our way in the dark along the roads except by looking up through the trees at the moon on top of us. We couldn't see the road, but we could navigate through the opening of the trees. Well, of course, before this time no matter where we went we'd end up at the cafe at the little village (whatever it was), and we had all the Frenchmen around there. And the quartet sang; we had the quartet in there with us, and we'd sing and we'd gather a backlog of cognac and anisette for the evening. We were always happy with that, and with a truck driver that had a half a dozen and more cognac and anisettes looking up at the road traveling forty-five miles an hour

down hills, it was rather precarious, but nobody paid any attention. [laughter]

And we got to the front. We weren't shot at directly by infantry or artillery or anything of that sort, but we were close to the front at times. We were not in a position ever very long; we moved back and forth for the month or so that we were up there. And we were always in fear of being bombed by airplanes. One week we had an airplane or two coming over for the whole week, every night for that week, just once a night, but that was enough; we got pale during that period, I'll tell you. And they did come fairly close, but it was all through visual navigation and they couldn't see anything at night, and so they didn't get us. Because if the dump was blown up, we'd have all blown up with it, of course. But they didn't get us. And the war came to the end, and we were right beyond the German outer lines when that happened. It was over an area where there hadn't been any pickups, and the dead were still there and so forth; two days before they'd removed, and they didn't take the dead with them. They didn't find them. We found them! We took part in four offensives: St. Mihiel, Verdun, Champagne, and Meuse-Argonne. And then after that we came through France and then back to Bordeaux. The quartet began to get busy, and we got into the YMCA circuit for about six months afterwards. I think they held the whole outfit there for

about six months after the war to use us, because we entertained all the YMCA outfits, right up to Pershing. Pershing was going to come one night, and he couldn't come, but his general staff came. And by that time we had a whole vaudeville show around the quartet; the quartet was the background of this vaudeville show. But it was a fun show because it pleased everybody; we were invited everywhere all the time, and we always ate at officers' mess and everything (which was unusual for just plain old privates to do at that time, you know). Although I got to be a corporal afterwards, I was a private at that time. And all around Bordeaux, for three weeks or more, we had done that. In the meantime I had kept a map along with my diary, and I found out that I had gone through or stopped at sixty-five little towns and villages all through France. That's quite an excursion. The tourist of today doesn't do that, or he can't get to do it, because the railroads in France are not built like the railroads in the United States; they're built to gather in all the little small towns from big place to big place. So you can get by truck in thirty minutes where it takes three hours to get by train to the same place. That was accomplished between Limoges and Chalus, because the trains gathered in all these little towns along the way and stopped at all of them. And they would converse Frenchwise for a few minutes, each engineer and station operator, and so

forth. And during that period we had a messenger that we sent out to contact this, that, and the other thing. He was French and could understand the language so he didn't have any difficulty getting around from place to place. But he, being French, was like the rest of the Frenchmen; no matter where we sent him on a five-minute excursion that would take at least a half an hour because at every street corner he'd stop and have a discussion about this, that, and the other thing with every Frenchman that he could find. So I began calling him Mercury. [laughter]

And then we came across to New York from Bordeaux on the Canonicus. The Canonicus, under the name of Sonora, was renamed and taken over from Spain by Americans. It only held 1,000 men, which is very, very small, because going over the Kroonland, I think there were 6,000 aboard that. We had control of the whole boat ourselves--we could go anywhere on the boat. It was very nice; the sailors were all great. And of course from time to time the quartet would entertain the soldiers, and we had a banjo trio, too, that did very well. One of them was the orchestra leader of the Odeon in San Francisco. The quartet sang above decks; I have a picture aboard the Canonicus coming home, and we had the sailors in tears, believe it or not. [laughter] Of course, by that time all the soldiers were used to us, because they'd heard us dozens of times. We got to New

York and were given the usual warm welcome, again in San Francisco; wherever we stopped off we got the World War I welcome, which was a bit different from later wars.

GARDNER: Right. So there you are; you're getting back in 1919.

COWAN: Yes. I got engaged before I went to Europe and then married after I came back from Europe.

GARDNER: Your wife was. . . ?

COWAN: She was Georgia Harvey--a San Francisco family. However, she was born in Shingle Springs just a dozen miles from Coloma and a dozen miles from Placerville. Part of her family's still up there in that region.

GARDNER: By the time you got back, your father's life had added on William Andrews Clark, because it's by the following year that he was put on salary by . . .

COWAN: I was home only two or three days before father came to Los Angeles for the first time to interview. And he was going to be there for $300 a month, which was wonderful, for a month trial. Well, that month expanded into sixteen years, and of course the salary went up all the time during that period.

So father left me, let's say, a comfortable estate. It wasn't grand or great or anything of that sort, and certainly small in this day's reckoning, but it was quite comfortable then and enabled me to buy property, low-class

property for rental purposes. I was fortunate enough to elect courts, which worked out very well. The upkeep was nil, and I did the upkeep myself. So I did double it in less than ten years by just having the courts, and keeping the normal rent down, which was twenty to twenty-five dollars at that time. The highest it ever got was sixty dollars, I think, and that was about 1965, when I began liquidating.

GARDNER: How did your father first get to know Clark?

COWAN: Clark had broken his arm--of course, Clark was a bookman, no question about it. And he and Miss [Cora] Sanders undertook the bibliography, but he wanted somebody that knew bibliography. So he asked John Nash, and Nash had introduced him to Charles Clark; and father did a job for Charles Clark, W.A.'s brother in San Mateo.

GARDNER: What sort of job?

COWAN: Bibliography: he cataloged his library. And for that job father got about fifteen first editions of Dickens, all beautifully bound in full Morocco by a top-notch binder in England.

GARDNER: In lieu of cash.

COWAN: Yes, definitely. Oh, it's a beautiful set. And W.A. went to Nash, who was his printer, and asked him. Nash sent father down with a recommendation from his brother also, and that's how father came down to Clark.

GARDNER: I see, and he immediately went to Los Angeles. Did he take up residence here?

COWAN: Half the time he spent in Los Angeles, and half of the time in San Francisco to engineer John Henry Nash through the printing of [the bibliography]. And by that time Clark had proceeded in the bibliographical field so he could get along without father. But he still wanted father with him as a houseguest. And until 1926, from 1919 to 1926, father was Clark's houseguest when he was in Los Angeles.

GARDNER: I see. But your mother remained in San Francisco and took care of the basement full of books.

COWAN: That's right, yes. And father, as far as I know, never missed a dinner with Clark, no matter who came to the house. And father was always a top entertainer, we'll say, and Clark loved it very much.

GARDNER: What do you recollect of it?

COWAN: There was a time that he had Rise Stevens, the famous singer, for dinner. The name was bantered around the table--Rise, how should it be pronounced and so forth. And it came to father, and he said, "I should pronounce it charmingly." Well, that almost broke the dinner party up! [laughter] And Clark went over and kissed him on the top of the head. "My bibliographer," he said.

GARDNER: What are your recollections of Clark, his

relationship with your father and so on, the sort of person he was?

COWAN: Well, it was a wonderful relationship, and my relationship was wonderful, too. Father was still half-time down here, and I came down in the summer because I was working for the Southern Pacific Company at the time; and with passes to the ends of the road, that is why I came in with the wife--no children at that time--and we were going to visit father and explore Los Angeles. I'd never been to Los Angeles before, so we stayed at the Clark Hotel down in Los Angeles. It was a very good hotel and one of the top hotels--not the top, not the most entertaining or expensive. So we stopped at the Clark, not only on account of the name, but it was recommended. We went out to visit father in the afternoon, and we met Mr. Clark. He asked us all kinds of questions and so forth, and he says, "Well, where are you staying?" And we told him. "Well," he says, "that won't do. You will stay here." And he gave us a room--his room, as a matter of fact. He stayed in one of the empty bedrooms. And he gave me a butler half-time, his <u>own</u> butler half-time, and his housemaid full-time to the wife. So we lived sumptuously; we were millionaires for two weeks. [laughter] During that time, his sister-in-law came in with a niece of Clark's, and he turned over his room, and he slept on the front

porch; instead of throwing us out of the house, he slept on the front porch. It was during the summer and very warm, and he said it got too hot in the house, anyhow. And he was that kind of a man; he always said, "Well, it got too hot in the house," so he would take the rough edge of it. He always did that. And, you know, he always took care of us; he gave us a night chauffeur and this night chauffeur was at UCLA--no, USC, studying dentistry. He became our dentist afterwards, and he took care of four generations of the Cowans.

GARDNER: Is that so? That's amazing.

COWAN: Yes. And that two weeks was a wonderful two weeks. He tried to get us into the Tuna Club in Catalina--women were verboten, so that was out of the picture. And then one night he had some Russians in there, and he didn't think we'd fit in very well with the Russians, so he had his secretary, Miss Sanders, take us out--no, no, we went with father, to see My Wild Irish Rose (I guess that was it) at the Burbank Theatre, which was a pretty good theater at that time, and dinner before. That was the only time we didn't have dinner with him while we were in town.

GARDNER: That's wonderful. So he was very generous.

COWAN: Oh, very! And that night I understood that he gave up one of his Stradivarius violins to one of the Russian boys that came in with the adults because he

showed signs of being a good violinist, and Clark was an excellent violinist.

GARDNER: Is that so?

COWAN: I imagine that's how he got in with the orchestra.

GARDNER: The Los Angeles [Philharmonic] Orchestra. What were your father's duties? Was he simply bibliographer? Or librarian, I suppose?

COWAN: Yes, and general entertainer of any celebrity that came in here, and general entertainer in the house and in the library. Of course, the library was in the house when father was there, before the new library was built, and a couple of pieces of furniture around here that I have came out of the library. Father got them eventually, and then they came to me. Father was his, you might say, entertainer along with doing his bibliography, for the most part in conjunction with Clark; it was a fifty-fifty deal, I imagine. And he always had to go to San Francisco. Well, father loved that, anyhow. And any time he'd go to San Francisco, he'd generally get [Henry] Wagner, who had a car and a chauffeur at that time, to go with him. And they rode up together, and as Wagner said in one of his books, he always dropped Cowan up there and Cowan never showed up again until it was time to go home. [laughter] He'd never see Cowan all the time that he was in San Francisco. Father'd go to all the old places he remembered before the

fire, and then to the bookshops. He liked to go to the bookshops and get a hold of all the new youngsters, you might say, in the bookshops, like Anna Marie Hager, and all the people that had just gone into the business as clerks, particularly women--Ellen Shaffer, now at the Stevenson Library, St. Helena, and all the rest of them--and talk to them. And that's the reason they all adored him: because he talked and told them stories--not about books. Well, they'd pull his leg once in a while for books, I imagine, naturally. But, anyhow, he was an entertainer no matter where he went.

GARDNER: Marvelous. Did he buy books for Clark?

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: Did Clark buy on his own as well?

COWAN: Oh, Clark bought on his own, but he'd often confer with father before buying.

GARDNER: I see.

COWAN: And Clark offered him a commission, always, which father wouldn't have; he'd reject it always. And Clark thought that was wonderful because everybody that surrounded him wanted their commission no matter what. And that's the reason Clark never had many friends. His millionaire acquaintances that might have been friends had no idea as to books and no consideration of music, so that left him alone. And father was the only go-between that he could

trust, because he learned after a while that father was above money grabbing.

GARDNER: And a bit above money for much of his life, as well. Well, let's make the move now before we finish up today. In 1926, then, you started packing up books.

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: Can you tell us something about that--what the circumstances were, what the move was like for everyone--I assume your mother then moved down?

COWAN: Yes, at that time. Well, she maintained the house up in San Francisco until that time. Up to that time I was working as cashier for the Southern Pacific Company on the auto ferry, which was a nerve-wracking job. On certain boats, the eight o'clock boat in the morning, you'd have at least six or eight trucks that lined up waiting to be weighed, and maybe anywhere from fifty or more automobiles waiting to get a ticket, and about forty or fifty pedestrians waiting to get tickets on the Creek Route when they had pedestrians at five cents to go cross the bay. And you'd have to weigh these trucks, establish the rate of the truck --was it a big truck or a small truck--and the driver's and passenger's fare. This all had to be on one ticket and written out from scratch. And then you had to weigh the truck on the scale, the beam of which was just inside of cashier's window. And then you'd have to get the fare

from the driver, and then subtract the fare from the gross to get the net, and then extend that at the going rate per ton, and then add the state toll, which was a weight, a percentage that had to be extended. And then the whole thing added up, one ticket for each truck, and then they had to slowly move off the scale after that. You had to do at least eight of those to get one boat loaded, and if the boat were late, it was your fault; there was the devil to pay, always. The cashier was responsible for all financial mistakes. I remember one episode on that thing where the boats were late, and it was no fault of ours. It was Christmas Eve, and there were oil cars spotted where the boats take oil. The boats drew oil, started on the Christmas run, and they began to slow up; they'd have to take the burners off every few minutes and clean them, because somebody had spotted a carful of molasses, instead of oil, over the sump. Well, of course, that went to the bottom of the sump, and the first boats that got there got the molasses. So by the end of the day, they were an hour and a half late, the three of them. Oh, and the traffic had piled up; that was a hideous mess that day. Well, that was a day that was easier on the cashiers; there was no pressure on them.

But when I first went to Southern Pacific Company, I was on a swing shift--one week on the Oakland side of the

bay and the other side, the San Francisco side the other week. And they'd tie up a boat on the San Francisco side, at night; and whereas I lived in Oakland, and in order to have me at six o'clock before any boats were running, I had to stay aboard the boat. I slept on all the boats that were tied up at the city, and I had to make sure I was on the right boat or else I'd be tied up in Oakland. So I'd leave early in the evening and get aboard the boat and sleep in San Francisco aboard the boat. I got to know all the captains and mates so any trip that I went over on, I'd go out on the promenade deck under the pilot house, and they'd see me and beckon, "Come on up." I never, you know, went up there and rapped, or otherwise they might throw me off; so they always had me up in the pilot house. I made many, many trips across San Francisco Bay. And many of them were old sea captains, and they were full of old sea stories that were great. It was wonderful! So sometimes I'd deliberately make a trip aboard to go to San Francisco and back again on another boat to listen to some of their stories. [laughter]

GARDNER: So then you become involved with trucking the library down. How did that work? How many tons?

COWAN: Twenty tons.

GARDNER: What did you do with them? How did you get them down here?

COWAN: After packing them in solid wooden boxes--no cartons, because father was afraid that the shifting of the cartons and the handling of the cartons . . . he didn't know how it was handled at that time. I didn't know either, as a matter of fact; although I conducted a lot of freight to go across on the ferryboats, I didn't know how it was packed. Anyhow, it ended up having a Bekins large truck van hoisted aboard a flat car with part of the library and a little part of the library in another van along with the household furniture that had accumulated. It took two large Bekins truck van bodies that were hoisted on a flat car and brought down here; and I don't know how it was handled down here because I wasn't here. I was still getting rid of stuff and getting the house in shape, because it was sold to a friend up in San Francisco, and he was a bit choosy in certain respects. He wanted it cleaned out; he didn't want to have any books, magazines, newspapers, or anything of that sort, so I had to get rid of those things. We dumped a lot on [John] Howell, as many as Howell would take for free, and other booksellers up in San Francisco and then called in the paper company for the rest of them. All that had to be done after father left. And then there was the shelving to be disposed of; well, that didn't give much trouble with that, because the new owner wanted the shelving. The shelving was redwood and it was either six or eight

inches wide, and some of it was twenty-four feet long. Well you could start a split at one end of that twenty-four-foot strip and it'd come out the same split at the other end it was so perfect, the grain was so straight. It was wonderful wood; it'd be worth a fortune today. Well, he didn't mind keeping that, even though in that day it wasn't worth very much and it wasn't worth packing up and taking down here and storing for who knows what. And so all that had to be taken care of. I did bring a few pieces down here when I packed my own stuff; I took a few pieces home and I made boxes out of it. I got the residue of the redwood shelving down here myself. I built a few things out of it myself. And the operation after that was simply all in Bekins's hands.

GARDNER: Did you move down here at that time, too?

COWAN: I sold my property. I'd taken a vacation from my job and then went and quit my job and then came down here after I sold the property up there.

GARDNER: Where did everybody live?

COWAN: I lived in the Melrose area in Oakland.

GARDNER: No, I mean when you came down here in 1926.

COWAN: Oh, on Twenty-fifth Street. That's where father landed--in one of Clark's houses.

GARDNER: I see. What was the address there, do you recall? It doesn't matter if you can't.

COWAN: Yes, it was 2164 West Twenty-fifth Street, the Clark property west of Gramercy by one house. Clark owned only a couple of pieces on Twenty-fifth Street; in fact, he was buying the property at that time. He didn't have the house next door on either side of father, but he had that one house and he was buying it piecemeal until he got the whole block.

GARDNER: So the whole family moved in there then?

COWAN: No, I rented a cheap little court over on Thirty-seventh Drive. It was all white over there then, but I lived next door to a Scotsman. The Scotsman was a contractor, and he built my house on Redondo Boulevard. And after six months or so of living in this court, we moved into our place over on Redondo Boulevard near Pico. And I had by that time a set-up for books, as I was architect of the house, you might say; I made a steep English roof and had a library room upstairs which extended all over the whole house. It was about 30 x 40 feet in size, and it became the library room.

GARDNER: So at this point, then, you are becoming a book person, too.

COWAN: Yes, by that time I was working on the bibliography. [laughter]

GARDNER: Well, I see the tape's about to run out, so why don't we stop here for now, and we'll pick up again next

week and talk some more about Clark and bibliographies and so on.

TAPE NUMBER: II [video session]

JUNE 2, 1978

GARDNER: Since we're here, I think the main topic of conversation might as well be the Clark Library. We started talking about it a little bit a few weeks ago and explored something about the trip down here and getting the books together. But as long as we're physically in the building, maybe you can describe to me what the setting was for your father--where it was in the building that he worked, and so forth and so on.

COWAN: Yes, he had his office, a little office on the north side of the building, and from there he worked ever since the library was established.

GARDNER: Who else was where, of the other people who worked in the library at that time?

COWAN: Miss Sanders and Clark worked together on the south side of the building in a little office there. Actually, there were two offices there; it's been changed around since, I think, but there were two offices. But they worked together pretty closely, because she was not only assistant librarian but she was secretary to him and everything else, everything but the social secretary.

GARDNER: To your father?

COWAN: No, to Clark.

GARDNER: What was Miss Sanders's relationship to your

father? Did they occupy complementary roles, or did they do some of the same things?

COWAN: No, Miss Sanders was assistant to Clark, really. The association was on a friendly basis, because they were passing limericks and all kinds of fun between them all the time. There was a bit of competition on Miss Sanders's part, because I think she wanted the librarianship, but father was in ahead of her a long time before she began working on the bibliography of the library. That was while it was in Clark's home and not in the library here. After the library was built, why, she wanted a substantial job then, I think. But there was no friction because father wouldn't allow anything of that sort. And, of course, father's contact with Clark was very, very friendly. For the first years that father was down here, he lived in the house entirely.

GARDNER: Here?

COWAN: No, before the library was built--in the house that's been torn down.

GARDNER: Oh, I see.

COWAN: He was a houseguest for six months out of the year, because he went up to San Francisco for six months to see the printing under John Henry Nash, and the rest of the time he was down here doing bibliography. That was before Miss Sanders got into the library picture very strongly,

because she was just Clark's secretary up until that time.

GARDNER: Was the house torn down?

COWAN: Yes, just a couple of years ago.

GARDNER: Oh, just a few years ago? So there was a house and a library.

COWAN: Yes. That was a beautiful building; it's a shame that it's gone. But they found foundational flaws in it, and I think they wanted to improve the scenery around here, so they tore it down.

GARDNER: I notice this building was built in 1926.

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: Do you recall any of the circumstances of that? Did your father participate in it? I guess you would have moved down here by then, wouldn't you.

COWAN: We moved down after the library was established and opened, and that's when father moved down here. Clark had given him a home, over on Twenty-fifth Street, which is now part of the grounds here. I didn't have any contact with the library at all, except in and out once in a while. But I didn't want to intrude--well, I had other things to do also; I had to make a living. [laughter] And then I began cataloging father's library at that time in his library, so it kept me across the back lot here. We used to go out and in the back way if necessary.

GARDNER: Where was the back way?

COWAN: The home on Twenty-fifth Street that father was in backed up against the library property here at that time. You just walked right across, and there was an opening in the back here. I don't believe it was fenced, even at that time. So that was very convenient; father just walked out of the back door of his place and into the side door here, right to his office.

GARDNER: Did he have anything to do with the actual construction of the library?

COWAN: Not at all.

GARDNER: None at all. I thought perhaps he might have advised as to the quality of the places to keep the books and perhaps the atmosphere for the books.

COWAN: No, that was impossible because those weren't any of father's attributes. He had no conception of what a thing looked like on paper before it was built, and he'd have to see it after it was built before he had any ideas. And then he'd never change anything anyhow. [laughter] He didn't see too well and everything in our home in San Francisco had to be left in the same place all the time. He wanted no changes of any kind. So even if he saw the plans, he wouldn't make any changes.

GARDNER: Why don't you describe what a typical day would have been for him when he was working at the Clark Library, while he was Mr. Clark's librarian.

COWAN: That'd be hard to say because I never spent a day over here myself. But from what I gathered, he'd simply come in, and he and Clark would be in the same room and work together and discuss things. Either one would steer one or the other according to his conception of things, but they conceived things very much together, and there wasn't any friction or any difficulty in that direction at all. Everything was very smooth. And Clark respected father very much because father was well established as a bibliographer at that time. But then Clark had his own ideas, because he started the bibliography before father got into the picture, actually. Father came down here on account of Clark breaking his arm and couldn't do anything with the books, and so he wanted help. Part of father's working day was, after lunch, one hour at billiards. Clark had purchased a table for him and had it set up in father's library. Clark had learned that father enjoyed the game.

GARDNER: I don't think you told that. Why don't you just go back over that for us?

COWAN: Yes, well, Clark had played golf, and he broke his arm or something and he couldn't do any writing. Miss Sanders was here, but then she wasn't qualified at that time to go ahead with the bibliography; so Clark thrashed around and asked John Henry Nash and also his brother Charles up in San Mateo. Well, father had done some work for Charles

before, bibliography work--he cataloged his library up there--and Nash promoted him, because Nash knew father quite well and had done several things in connection with father. And then Clark said, "Well, come down here, and we'll try out for a month." And the month extended to sixteen years. [laughter] They liked each other that well; Clark was very, very fond of father in a social way as well as a bibliographical way.

GARDNER: Right. There must have been quite a few social events here.

COWAN: Not particularly, because Clark was a loner. The people that weren't of his wealth would always have an ax to grind, so he was very aloof and very afraid, and he very seldom ever had anybody in that wasn't of his own financial caliber. The people that were of his financial caliber had no interest in books or music; so they were out of the picture. So he had very, very few friends. The parties that he did have were for visiting celebrities of one kind or another, particularly in music with regards to the philharmonic, which he set up and organized. He'd have them for dinner, and father would always be one of the guests; he was there all nights, whether there was anybody there or not. It made no difference to Clark until father moved to L.A. Father made himself acceptable on account of his humor and wit and so forth to most people

that came in there. Rise Stevens was invited here one night, and there was some discussion about how her name should be pronounced; she was right there listening, and she didn't say a word, from what I understand. And the discussion got around to father, and he said, "Well, I don't know how to pronounce Rise, except one way, and this is charming." Well, that drew the house down, and he got a kiss on the top of his head from Clark! [laughter] And that was his relationship with Clark; that was their relationship all the time.

GARDNER: That's very nice. What about Harrison Post? Does he come in later?

COWAN: Yes, a little bit later. No, he was here in '26. But he didn't do anything as far as the bibliography was concerned; he was just a figurehead and a character to have around the house, that was all. You've got his name in the books as assistant librarian, I think, and he was considered assistant librarian; but he was kind of a social adjunct of the house that didn't do anything particularly, except that he knew and had all the famous Russians into the place when they did come to town.

GARDNER: Famous Russians?

COWAN: Yes, because he was Russian. Post wasn't his name, it was an assumed name.

GARDNER: What sorts of Russians?

COWAN: Hmm?

GARDNER: What sorts of Russians? Visiting royalty and that sort of thing?

COWAN: Well, no royalty at that time because it was after the revolution. And no book people, but mostly musicians he had here, on account of the philharmonic as much as anything. Of course, they'd come with a whole group out to the place here. One night when we stayed at the house here, why, Clark had a lot of Russians in, and we were taken out by Miss Sanders to dinner and we saw Abie's Irish Rose down at the Burbank Theatre for the evening, because he didn't think that the Cowans would get along too well with the Russians. [laughter] So he sent us out. And that night there was a very young boy--I don't suppose he was more than eleven or twelve years old-- that seemed to be very apt with the violin, and Clark gave him one of his Stradivarius violins that night.

GARDNER: Ooh!

COWAN: I don't know what's happened to the boy since.

GARDNER: Oh, I thought you were going to say he turned out to be Yehudi Menuhin or something like that.

COWAN: No. No, I don't know what happened to him. I didn't know his name at the time and, of course, I couldn't follow up.

GARDNER: As far as gathering the collections, Clark's

collections--I suppose your father played a very important role in that. Was he responsible for choosing what books would be bought, and so on and so forth?

COWAN: No.

GARDNER: None at all?

COWAN: No.

GARDNER: How did Clark buy?

COWAN: He bought through agents and at auctions and one thing or another; but it was all his own choosing. Once in a while he'd have father buy something, and what promoted father in Clark's estimation was the fact that father would never take any commission on anything. Never! He'd never had anybody in his employ that was ever that way before. [laughter] That endeared father to Clark. Father didn't have very much to do with the designing of the library and the categories into which the library developed at all. That was all Clark, and that was all really quite developed before father got into the picture at all.

GARDNER: Right, but it continued afterwards.

COWAN: It continued afterwards, and it was made a great library and more extensive in various directions, like Pope and Wilde, and so forth. He aimed particularly at that category, so that whenever anything came up that they didn't have in the library he'd go after it and get it one way or another.

GARDNER: Did you know any of the local booksellers at that time? Were you acquainted with them? I'm told, for example, that Alice Millard was one of the booksellers from whom Mr. Clark did a lot of buying; I came across some correspondence of hers in the collection. Did you know her?

COWAN: Personally, I didn't know her, no. Father did--yes, definitely. They never had any business as far as personal business was concerned, because Mrs. Millard was high and fine. She wanted millionaire customers, etcetera, etcetera, and she put the price on accordingly. Well, that didn't appeal to father as far as his own personal library was concerned. She handled a great many fine things in all fields, but not too much Californiana. It was mostly things that appealed to Clark in his library here.

GARDNER: What about some of the other local booksellers? Since your father was really a San Franciscan to begin with, did he quickly fall in with the local people--Ernest Dawson. . . ?

COWAN: No, because he knew them and was well known to them long before he ever came down here, on account of his book activities.

GARDNER: I see.

COWAN: Dawson knew him, oh, twenty years or more before he came down here; in fact, the moment Dawson opened his store,

I suppose, father probably came down here or sent to him and put his name on the list for Californiana, I'm quite sure. So he knew most of the bookstores. And it was his hobby, even after he was librarian at the Clark Library here, to go downtown, oh, three or four times a week and just spend a half a day or so circulating in all the bookshops and picking up all kinds of oddities, as well as Californiana--but mainly Californiana--to improve his own collection.

GARDNER: Were there any of the booksellers that he was more friendly with than one of the others of that group, that Sixth Street group?

COWAN: Well, he was friendly with all of them. [Jake] Zeitlin was downtown at that time; he was on Sixth Street first and then afterwards. Bennett and Marshall--no, I don't believe so; I think they opened up a little bit later. And of course he was in and out of Dawson's all the time, and he used to spend many an afternoon down at Dawson's talking to the young clerks, particularly the female young clerks, [laughter] because they would listen with mouths open, awed by his stories and recitations and what he knew about books. They really pulled his leg in that direction. He'd done that to a great many people, so when father died, why, everybody who had contacted father thought they were his protégés. They all came to me and said, "I'm a protégé

of your father's," and so on. Tried to pull my leg; I knew better. [laughter]

GARDNER: I noticed from the random reflections that you gave me to read last week that he was also very involved in the organization of the Zamorano Club.

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: Could you describe that; that would be an interesting story to tell.

COWAN: From what I know, [Arthur] Ellis was the instigator of that club, because he was very much involved in printing and he wanted to set up an organization like the Roxburghe in San Francisco down here. He gathered many of these people around him, and so forth. But he was very, very close to father. They used to visit about twice a week at either house and, of course, Ellis was always promoting the Zamorano Club and talking about it. Actually, father gave it the name, because Zamorano, being California's first printer, was a proper name, or at least they thought so. And so did Ellis; so he assumed that name, although he had other names in tow that he offered. But that was the one that stuck. And, of course, father was one of the charter members of the Zamorano Club in that connection and was with it until he died.

GARDNER: Were you ever a part of the Zamorano Club?

COWAN: No, no. About a week after father died, they asked

me if I wanted to take up the Zamorano membership that father had, and I wasn't ready for it at that time; things were in an uproar in my house on account of father's death and so forth, so I turned it down temporarily and never got the opportunity again. [laughter]

GARDNER: Well, I suspect it's their loss.

COWAN: Well, I'd been a guest down there once in a while, but . . .

GARDNER: John Henry Nash, of course, is the catalyst for many of the things that went on. He seems to have played a middle role, in a way, between your father and William Andrews Clark, of course, as the San Francisco printer for this and, I guess, a lot of other things for Clark.

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: I imagine you knew Nash personally.

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: Could you tell me about, first, your father's relationship with him, and then something about Nash personally?

COWAN: Well, father's relationship with him was entirely on a business basis. Father had no business acumen, and all the things that he ever brought out he was pushed into by somebody or other--the book club, and so forth. And then Howell and Nash--they all pushed him into the various bibliographies that he'd gotten out. Nash seemed to

think a great deal of him as far as a bibliographer is concerned, and his activities and position and so forth, but nothing ever social, because Nash was a high reacher. He'd socialize with Clark and go up to Deer Lodge with him in the summertime. And he'd socialize with Hearst and be at the castle on weekends and days at a time. He was a high liver, and I guess that's the reason he went broke in his business establishment as a printer; he had to go broke. He amassed quite a library of incunables and very early printed books, and I think Nash sold them to an Oregon institution somewhere to get out of difficulties here. That didn't pull him through either, because he lived pretty high.

GARDNER: How long did his relationship last with Clark? More or less throughout Clark's life?

COWAN: Oh, yes, right up to the end. It was quite a close relationship. When this library was first established there were some doors on here that Clark didn't particularly like--I think they were big ancient thick doors or something--and he gave them to Nash and put them on his house in Berkeley. Of course the house burned down two years later, I think, and the doors went with it.

GARDNER: What about the Montana collection? Clark had quite a bit of material on that. Was your father involved in that, since that was sort of western Americana; or was that also something that he did more or less on his own?

COWAN: Clark was involved indirectly, on account of father, in the Montana collection. That collection was built by a man by the name of Kessler (I think Kessler Brewery up there had some relationship to him), and he collected probably the best Montana collection in private hands. Of course, Clark, being born in Montana, had a little bit of interest in it, but practically none. But father was interested in western Americana--it didn't make any difference where--so he actually bought that for father to play with. [laughter] He put it in the basement of this library, and it was there until father left the library.

GARDNER: And then your father took it with him?

COWAN: No, no. That was Clark's.

GARDNER: I see.

COWAN: Father had no strings on it at all. It was simply there for father to play with. [laughter]

GARDNER: I think that unless you have anything to add about Clark or any of that, I think we've covered that fairly thoroughly; so I think what I'll do is turn to my list of personalities and have you comment on some of them--again, from both points of view: both the relationship with your father and then also your own personal relationship with them. Of the early people that I have--well, these predate you, I think--are people like [Chester]

Rowell and Bancroft. I guess those go back into the nineteenth century. Did your father ever tell you much about his dealings with them, his relationships with them?

COWAN: Oh, yes. Father always talked at the evening meals, no matter what. It was a remote relationship that he had with Rowell, and he couldn't take much of Benjamin I. Wheeler. But there were some people that he was very close to in the university. Teggart was one he was very close to personally; they used to visit back and forth. Teggart had a boy about my age, and that was part of the deal, too. Father wanted very much to be the librarian of the Bancroft Library when it went to Berkeley; but Teggart got it, and that upset the friendship a bit.

GARDNER: Did it really?

COWAN: Yes, although it went on after that. They were not closely related when they died, but they were still sociable when he died (Teggart died first, I think).

GARDNER: Had he been friendly with H.H. Bancroft?

COWAN: Yes, very friendly. After the bibliography came out in 1914, why, I have a letter from Bancroft himself congratulating him on the bibliography. He knew father before that. He gave him entrée to his own library when it was on Valencia Street in the old brick building over there. And father had entry every Sunday or any other time that he

wanted to go there, whether Bancroft was there or not. He didn't have the keys, but he'd go there at any time and was allowed in. I was taken there and introduced to him, and so forth; and he patted me on the top of my head and admonished me to be a good boy and all that sort of stuff. [laughter] And I remember when I was in there he always had his office in the west side with the window behind his desk, and we were in there in the afternoon with the sun behind him. I couldn't see much of Bancroft, but he could see everything about us. He was like Carranza; Carranza, the president of Mexico, used to do the same thing so he could see people and they couldn't see him too well.

GARDNER: That's very interesting. Among the early booksellers in San Francisco are people like Paul Elder, John Newbegin. Did your father know them as booksellers, as friends? How did that work?

COWAN: With Elder, father was in and out of the shop when it was Elder and Shepard a long time before it was separated. Shepard went up to Salt Lake, and Elder continued the business here and established himself; it's still in existence. And they were very close. Father got along very well with Shepard but not too well with Elder. And Newbegin--that was a good relationship there, bookwise. Newbegin, I think, was quite socially minded. Father would pull stunts like putting out prizes for

poetry in regards to Newbegin in the shop, and limericks and so forth. I remember father wrote a limerick about Newbegin's shop, something about the pelican who held more in his bill than his belly "kin" and ended up with Newbegin. [laughter] It was a fairly clever thing; I don't know whether he got a prize for it or not. Father was involved and they were quite close--in a business way, not social.

GARDNER: What about the Howells? John Howell would have been his contemporary, and I guess Warren Howell is yours.

COWAN: Yeah, well, I'm close to Warren Howell, as close as you can get to him; he's rather aloof, you know. [laughter] And the same way with his father: you always feel in his presence as if the both of them were looking down on you. And they put up an austere front. Nevertheless, they appreciated the Cowans, both of them, and still do. Although John is gone, Warren still appreciates me; he's very courteous to me and sits down and has a five- or ten-minute talk when I go into the place. Of course, John Howell induced father to get out the bibliography on the Spanish press for one thing, which Howell had printed. He was the publisher.

GARDNER: That was one of the early bibliographies.

COWAN: Yes, I think it was 1919.

GARDNER: Then I have a number of people down here. I'll

ask you general questions first. Since your father was so close to John Henry Nash, for example--or at least on a business level in the north--was he acquainted with some of the printers down here, some of the Southern California people of that era?

COWAN: Ward Ritchie, of course. I don't think he was particularly acquainted with any of them. Of course, he knew of them, and they knew his name and so forth.

GARDNER: But he did no work with them?

COWAN: No, not as far as I know, excepting Ritchie.

GARDNER: Bruce McCallister?

COWAN: Well, he knew the name; that's been brought up in the house many times. But the man was never at the house as far as I know, or never any personal acquaintance.

GARDNER: I see. When he was down here--and he was down here for how many years? Fifteen or twenty years--did he develop any close personal friendships or relationships?

COWAN: All the booksellers along Sixth Street. There was [Fred] Lofland and--well, I don't remember all of them now. Of course, Norman Holmes was down here. But Norman Holmes never had anything to offer; it was more Goodwill stuff than any kind of books. [laughter] But up in San Francisco he was very close to Harold Holmes. I was also, because in later life Holmes liked to sit down and talk; and when I'd go up, there was always a big long talk in

his library for anywhere from a half-hour to two hours and a half. He enjoyed it, seemingly.

GARDNER: Anybody outside the book business with whom he became friendly? I'm talking about the years in Los Angeles now, trying to get some idea.

COWAN: Well, he was rather close to [Ed] Grabhorn. When Nash blew up, for royalties we got about 400 copies of the bibliography. Nash only sold 200 of the 400 copies; 300 were in unbound sheets which father induced Grabhorn to store in his basement, until eventually I got father to move them down here. Had he left them up there, we would never have probably seen them again; but when the bibliography began to get scarce, why, then we got these sheets down, and I folded the sheets and sold them that way. And that was our royalty. We got $200 or $250 in cash, and that's all we ever did get for six years' work. [laughter]

GARDNER: That's not a very good per-hour rate.

COWAN: And every time I'd go to San Francisco, I'd sit and hobnob with Ed Grabhorn, smoking his pipe in front of the fireplace on Sutter Street, for a half-hour or an hour, according to how busy he was. But he was acceptable to having company, at least my company, as far as I know, and we had some nice talks. He was quite a collector; he had a fine collection of Californiana.

During the Los Angeles period, many notables came to

father's home: J. Gregg Layne, Phil Hanna, Larry Powell, Paul Jordan and Sarah Bixby Smith were a few that came often. The Henry Wagners and the R.E. Cowans visited quite often back and forth for dinner. During the last years of Wagner's life I visited him about once a month. He always made me welcome. There were times when others were turned away. Mrs. Wagner always joined when she learned that I was there.

GARDNER: The other thing I think might be appropriate to talk about, since we're on UCLA territory, is the disposition of your father's collection finally to UCLA: how that came about; something about his relationship with UCLA.

COWAN: Well, he was very close to [J.] Gregg Layne, for one thing, although I don't know what the contact was with UCLA as far as Layne is concerned. When UCLA first established itself out in Westwood, why, Layne bought a house right in the immediate area.

GARDNER: That was clever.

COWAN: Yes. [laughter] When the bibliography came out and Clark died, father had to move out of the house, and he moved the library twice, and that was enough. He thought he had better dispose of the library, so he contacted people--Moore was the librarian at that time, wasn't he?

GARDNER: Ernest Carroll [Moore] was the provost. What year was it then?

COWAN: About 1930, '34, '35.

GARDNER: Ernest Carroll Moore was the provost of the university. [John E.] Goodwin, I suppose.

COWAN: Anyhow, he had contact with the people out there, and I think Moore had something to do with it. Then he sold the library, at least father sold the library, and I lost track of the library ever since, because I never went out there to see it. Because he left me a tremendous number of duplicates--it was almost a duplicate library that I inherited--and I had no reason to go out there. I made use of what I had and explored elsewhere because of the parking problems out there; and it was a long ways out, and so forth.

GARDNER: Even in those days.

COWAN: Yes, quite true; they expanded the parking facilities always too late. [laughter] So I never followed the library in that direction.

GARDNER: What about the Clark Library, its acquisition by UCLA. Did that come about around the same time?

COWAN: Yes, it came about the same time. Although it was willed to UCLA in 1926, Clark retained a life's estate in it. Father was, you might say, discharged, because Clark's financial status came from 60 million down to about 4 million, and he thought he was a pauper. [laughter] So he cut corners, and one of them was to allow father to go. And he

let father live in the house that Clark moved over on Twenty-second and Cimarron until he died, when, of course, the house went to someone else. But Clark, being much younger than father, anticipated outliving him, and so he let father live there for free until he died. Well, of course, father had to move then, and father's library had to be moved.

GARDNER: Okay, why don't we now turn back to your life at this time, and have you recount. I think the last we have of you, we have you going through the service; we have you working, I guess, on that ferry, and then helping bring the books down here. And is that '26?

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: Okay, what then with Robert G. Cowan? [laughter]

COWAN: Well, he built himself a home, eventually, at Pico and Redondo Boulevard. At that time I was working at father's library on the bibliography, and in that consideration I was not only the bibliographer for the Cowan family, but I was also the chauffeur and the man of all sorts and did a lot of things including an hour at billiards each day with father. After we got through with the library and it was sold, I went into the stamp business--with a little bit of help from father--and established myself, first in a partnership on Fourth Street near Main, and then I moved into the Philharmonic building at Fifth and Olive (on the

ground floor right next to the stage entrance) and had that shop for a half-dozen years.

GARDNER: What was it called?

COWAN: The LaCal Stamp Company. I assumed the name when I took over the partnership myself. And I thought it was going to do well there right across the street from the Biltmore. But I never got a customer, I don't think, from the Biltmore. Then the war came along, and the rents went up, and I couldn't see any advantage in keeping on; so I got out and let it go. And then I thrashed around a bit and didn't know just what to do. Father died shortly after that in 1942, so he left me a few thousand dollars, and I invested in property. I had very cheap court dwellings, and they paid very, very well--gave me a living, kept me busy most of the time. And before I sold the stamp shop, I got involved in yachting, and a friend of mine, a Dr. A.A. Steele, whose boat the Stella Maris was in the last Honolulu race before the war as scratch boat. . . . It was a new boat, and he had difficulty getting there; otherwise, he might have won the race. But anyhow, that race left San Francisco on the Fourth of July, so we went up there with a big "Good Luck" sign on the Golden Gate Bridge for when the boat went under it, but it was so foggy he didn't see us and we couldn't see him, so that was a lost thing. [laughter] Well, anyhow, he'd taken me out on the boat, and I got involved right away in

sailing. I'd been on the water a lot in San Francisco Bay, but always on a boat, a tug or something of that sort, and on the ferryboats, too. I liked sailing right from the day I went out on it, so I bought a boat for $1,000. It was the old Venus, which had quite a name for itself around the San Francisco area, built in 1902 by Fellows and Stewart. And it got to be horribly soggy and slow, and they cut down the sail area; so it was very slow when I got it. And I kept it about two years and then sold it and started to build my own boat by putting 8,000 pounds of lead into the keel. I poured it myself by setting up a bathtub and putting coal underneath it and pulled the plug and let the lead run down to the forms. I built the boat according to the design this Dr. Steele had made for the boat after his own boat. And the design was written up in Sea magazine, which is a nautical magazine of the era. I had that until I sold it in about 1943--no, about 1950 I sold that and entertained the whole family at that time. Well, I had at least one person for a crew, and it was always a son; and his family became the wrong age, and so he wasn't going out too often. So I sold the boat at that time and just kept my nose into books and kept property, up until a few years ago when it got out of hand--too many government regulations and everything of that sort. The property was good property, although the area changed in disposition

and it was hard collecting rents. And so I finally gave it up.

GARDNER: Well, now that you've mentioned your family, I think we can go back and do some chronology and some description of your family. First of all, tell when you were married and to whom, and then your children--when they were born.

COWAN: I was engaged before the war, and after the trip to France, about six months later, I became married. I was married in 1919 in October. Just before we were married, we found a little place in Fruitvale and put down $500 and chase me for the rest on a $3,000 house, which is a very nice house. It was reasonable for that time but not cheap. It was an older house, the first bungalow built in Oakland. It must have been about 1915, along in that era, when it was built. It was called Honeymoon Row because it was in a row of bungalows on Bartlett Street there. We got one of those. It was secondhand at the time--it wasn't new--and we lived in there for six years. Then we moved to the Melrose area and lived there for another year, and then moved down here. And all during that time I commuted to San Francisco or down to Oakland wharf. I got involved in the Southern Pacific Company at that time, and it was a matter of commuting, very agreeable commuting, to San Francisco on the ferryboats. They had clubs in every

corner of the ferryboat, and some of them would get out and bet as to whether a seagull was going to fly off the piling when the whistle blew, and all kinds of things of that sort. They had card games going over there about twenty minutes on board the boat, and then they'd get on the train and we had to show our tickets when we got near the end of the run. At times I snoozed then and was tapped on the shoulder and awakened just before my station to show my ticket or pay my dime, so I always got off at the right place. [laughter] Never overslept! When I lived in Fruitvale, it was about a mile-and-a-half walk to the station, and for a time I didn't have a car; and even when I did have a car I still walked down to the back lots. And there wasn't any danger of being mugged then, so even though it was sometimes late at night we had no trouble with it. It was a good exercise and a good walk.

GARDNER: When were your children born?

COWAN: The first one was born in 1923 and the other one in 1924.

GARDNER: And their names?

COWAN: Robert III (although there's no middle names that were the same, he's still the third Robert), and then William Alfred. We chose Alfred on account of a friend of mine, and also it gave him the same initials as W. A. Clark. [laughter] And Clark sent congratulations and a

bit of a present down at that time, a letter which I consider was much better than a present. It was a very nice letter wishing us happiness and all of that.

GARDNER: They were both born up north.

COWAN: Yes, one in San Francisco and one in Alameda; I say Alameda because he went to the General Hospital in Alameda, but we lived in Oakland at that time. They had all their education down here in the lower schools.

GARDNER: Well, we'll jump back for a second here before we come to some more of you. Return briefly to your father and tell some of the organizations he was in. I was fascinated when I was going through his papers to find that he was--I hesitate to say "a compulsive joiner" because that says something psychological, but he was a member of so many different clubs and associations it was really striking to me. I'll mention some of them to you, and you can tell me something about what they were and what his participation was. Some of them are obvious, but some others aren't. The first one's the Monticello Club. Do you know what that was?

COWAN: It was a high-grade club of individuals of high mental caliber--not a Playboy club or anything of that sort, but they went there to listen to talks, historical talks and book talks and whatnot. That didn't last very long, as far as I know.

GARDNER: Yes, a number of these seem to have lasted a very short time.

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: How about the California Historical Genealogical Society?

COWAN: He was in that about the time I came along. They published father's paper on the Spanish press, which he read before the Library Association in 1902.

GARDNER: Their interest was the genealogy of old California, rather than personal individual genealogy.

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: The next one I have is the California Library Association. Was he an early member of that?

COWAN: Yes, I suppose he got into that about the time I was born, about 1895. And he'd go to their meetings for purely political reasons; he was after a librarianship somewhere.

GARDNER: Right.

COWAN: He knew books, but they didn't know it unless he exposed himself. So he joined that society and was, you might say, an active member. He didn't take any office, as far as I know, but he was very active in it in one way or another just to promote himself.

GARDNER: The American Historical Association is another organization of which he was a member, and one of the

most impressive things to me, going through the collection, the papers, was a letter from Frederick Jackson Turner. I assume your father was active in the American Historical Association.

COWAN: No, never active. But they published the article "Bibliographical Notes on Early California" in the 1904 report.

GARDNER: Oh, I see, that all ties in.

COWAN: That was a remote membership that he went into and one of the few that he did set up; he wasn't a joiner, although the list may show it, because . . .

GARDNER: The list implies it.

COWAN: From there on, practically everything in the list there (if you want to read them off, go ahead) he was pushed into, like the Fire Department and other organizations, on account of his talks that he'd given around here and there. They made him an honorary member or a member and that's how those things came about.

GARDNER: Well, the next couple are a little funnier; these really titillated me, and I'd like to know something about them. The next one is something called the Tongue-Waggers. Have any idea what the Tongue-Waggers are?

COWAN: I never heard of it, no.

GARDNER: How about the Last Thursday Club, which was also sometimes the First Thursday Club? That seems to

be a place where they got together and also gave speeches to one another.

COWAN: I don't know about that.

GARDNER: The 6:30 Club?

COWAN: I know about that. That was a club of university professors and people of the same mental quality with a broad sense of humor, that met and had dinner once a month. They wrote papers on abstract subjects, and after dinner and after the paper was read, why, they proceeded to tear the paper apart. Everyone around the table--there were about a dozen of them that would show at the meetings--they all had about five minutes' talk to just actually tear the paper apart. And if the member couldn't take it psychologically, they were asked to resign. [laughter] They even brought Jack London in one day, but they couldn't take him and he couldn't take them, so he was never asked again.

GARDNER: An interesting group. Now I have down here Grolier Club, so I assume he was an early member of that. Do you know anything about his relationship with them?

COWAN: It's very remote, but then his reputation was established by that time. And Miss Granniss, who was the secretary, had my middle name, spelled the same, so father decided that she must be of our family, or at least Colonel Granniss's family somewhere down the line, so he

invited her. And, of course, she knew all about him; she'd been to the house several times. So he simply kept on with that, very remote. He didn't do anything for them, and I don't believe they did anything for him, except just to promote the institution. Because it was a book thing and that's the reason he was a member--because it was promoting books. I believe Clark sponsored him.

GARDNER: I have him down for a membership with the Pacific Philatelic Society.

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: He was obviously very close to stamp collecting all his life.

COWAN: Yes, he was.

GARDNER: It seems to have spilled over to you.

COWAN: In his early youth he and his sister lived in the house for two weeks alone while their parents went off on a vacation. They were teenagers, and they were both stamp collectors, and they took most of the twenty dollars that was left to them for food for the two weeks and spent it on stamps; they almost starved for about a week. [laughter] He was involved in stamps in that way, and he joined the Pacific Philatelic Society. At that time he wasn't active in stamp collecting, but he did have a backlog of stamps because he'd been collecting many, many pieces of correspondence, and along with it came the covers--very interesting

and valuable covers of the '49 and '50s period, with the old hand stamps on them that are very, very scarce and very collectible. He had a lot of those, as well as early United States stamps that had come off these early letters. He always kept them on the envelopes, which is much better. And he was interested to a certain extent in philately in that way, not as a collector; actually, he stored them for future use. During the last dozen years of his life, he collected western express covers. He had one unique cover. It was sent from Martinez, California, to Chicago, then readdressed with another stamp to Lansing, Michigan, by someone unfamiliar with adhesive stamps who probably licked off most of the gum but, to insure delivery, inscribed, "Prepaid if the damn thing sticks" on the envelope.

For about eighteen years, I think it was, or twelve years, he was secretary of the Pacific Philatelic Society, until the opening of the Panama Canal or until about the time of the threat to open the Panama Canal. He saw too much work involved in philately, so he resigned from that, and therefore he lost his interest in the philatelic society. During most of this period, Henry Crocker, of the renowned Crocker family, was president.

GARDNER: I see. Did you pick it up early? Were you a stamp collector when you were young?

COWAN: Yes, yes. Right from the time I was eight or ten

years old.

GARDNER: I see. So then when you went into the business, it was something you were well familiar with.

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: Do you still have a collection?

COWAN: No, I don't. I got in the business, and I found out it wouldn't pay to collect and be in business at the same time. You'd be either robbing the stock at the store or you'd be robbing the collection at home. So I dumped the whole collection into the shop. Incidentally, that collection eventually landed in a pair of albums that W.A. Clark had given me along the line sometime or other, and it had some very fine early Nova Scotia and Canadian stamps in there, a beautiful collection of these two and then a miscellany of other stamps also.

GARDNER: And you sold them all?

COWAN: Yes, I sold them all eventually.

GARDNER: It's an interesting contrast, given your father being a bookseller and book collector who ended up robbing his bookselling so that he could collect; and on the other hand stamps, which you ended up throwing into the business. That's an interesting contrast. Well, I had a couple more societies; we have a little more time, so I'll keep running them down until the tape runs out.

COWAN: All right.

GARDNER: Your father was a member of the California Historical Society, and that's something that I think would be very important, with your own interest in historical societies and so on. Do you know much of his connection with them, his early days?

COWAN: Well, he was one of the refounding members, you might say, because he came in with Henry R. Wagner and Templeton Crocker, and they organized it. There were three or four of them, and I think there were several others who were involved in the actual organization of it. But that wasn't father's field of activity. He was no organizer in any sense of the word, but he went along with all of them.

GARDNER: When was that?

COWAN: In 1922. That's when they reorganized it. It had nothing to do with the original one because the original one was disbanded about 1880-something-or-other, and it never picked up again. So there were no members that were hangovers; they'd all died off by that time, and there were no original members that were tied over into this new one. This new one was organized in 1922, and eventually father was involved, and he was very close to Miss Dorothy Huggins, who was the first secretary. She is now the widow of George Harding; she married George Harding later. And then father was president for one year

in the thirties.

GARDNER: Were you a member of it at that time?

COWAN: No, later.

GARDNER: Tell me something about his presidency then; that's an interesting area. What sort of responsibilities did he have, do you recall?

COWAN: Well, he was on the board of directors, and I think on account of his living down here, they wanted him off the board of directors. So the easiest way was to put him in the presidency for one year, and then he was out. [laughter] But he was no parliamentarian. Oh, he handled the meetings all right, but nothing exciting went on at that time; it was just routine stuff, as far as I know.

GARDNER: It was a matter of setting up meetings and transacting whatever business there was, and there were no major issues?

COWAN: No. Well, he was smart enough to appoint committees for all that, I'm quite sure. [laughter]

GARDNER: Okay, I'll keep on down my list. We'll come back to your participation in the historical societies next time. Do you know anything about the Wine and Food Society?

COWAN: No.

GARDNER: The Society of California Pioneers?

COWAN: Yes, he was made an honorary member of that.

He and Theodore Roosevelt had been the only honorary members up to that time.

GARDNER: What is it? Is it literally what it says? It's an organization composed of people who . . .

COWAN: It's composed of men whose fathers came here before 1850, before the close of 1849. Otherwise there's no possibility of getting into the society. It's a rather strong society in that nature today, competing with the California Historical Society, because, although they were burned out, they still have a lot of artifacts. It's a museum, and they have a fine book collection, mostly donated. Father was connected through them in his honorary membership, which was promoted by Phil Bekeart. Philip B. Bekeart was the son of the first gunsmith in Coloma, in 1849, and Phil Bekeart continued the business until he left it to his son, Philip K. It has just recently folded. So there's three Bekearts that ran this original gun business. And of course Bekeart was a wheeler and dealer for the Pioneer Society, and so he got father in there as an honorary member, because that was the only way he could get him in. But father had been moved down here by that time. I don't think he went to too many meetings, but anyhow he was indeed proud to be in that society.

GARDNER: You know anything about the Atheneum?

COWAN: No.

GARDNER: I don't even know what that is. The last one that I have is Friends of the Huntington Library.

COWAN: On account of the library--that's the only reason that he joined that. Of course, like I mentioned before, he sold Macdonald's collection to Huntington. He was involved in the library in that direction and he knew what was in there because all this stuff that Macdonald collected eventually went into the Huntington Library.

GARDNER: Was he involved with the founding of the group, do you know? I would assume that their friends group probably would have set up around the thirties sometime.

COWAN: I don't believe so, no. Of course, he knew all the heads at the Huntington Library at that time--[Robert] Schad and all the rest of them.

GARDNER: Okay, well, I've come to the end of my list for today. When we get together next time, we can go more closely through the rest of your life and your participation in the historical society, your writing and so on, and finish up on your father. Thank you very much.

COWAN: Well, thank you.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

JUNE 8, 1978

GARDNER: As I just mentioned--I'll say it again for the benefit of history--I thought we'd start off now and talk a little bit more about your own life in Southern California and what we were talking about last time, your publications and your work with the historical societies. First of all, why don't you talk about your family, whatever you'd like to say about them--your children, grandchildren and so on. That's an interesting place to start off.

COWAN: Well, the field is too big. As far as my own activities are concerned in Los Angeles, I got myself involved in many things; and principally, at the bottom of the Depression. I learned to play the bass fiddle and got in with an orchestra, a rather peculiar situation. Clark's night chauffeur was going to USC for a dental course, and he became a dentist. Well, he became the dentist for the entire family, and we were very close to him. And he came to the house one night, and I showed him my banjo and tinkered around with that a bit. He got involved with the banjo, and he created an orchestra, and he said, "Well, we can't have two banjos in the orchestra. You've got to play something else." And I said, "Well, I'll play the bass fiddle." I'd never had my hands on a bass fiddle before, but I went over to Los Angeles High School evening class and sat in.

I could read notes because of my musical background, so I could find a note along the line that I could play. And from that point on, why, I wanted to, so I became--well, not good, but fair as a bass player. Anyhow, it was good enough for the orchestra that he organized. And the orchestra grew--it was a ten-piece orchestra--and we did very well at the end, playing for some mighty big dances like Polytechnic High School. They packed in 600 in there. And then we had a radio spot for six months; we played ahead of the Hillbillies there, which was quite a break for us. And then we played some exclusive dances, like the Canadian Club, and we also played at the Moose Hall in Inglewood for three dollars a night. [laughter] We had a really good orchestra, and eventually [Frank B.] Fisher, who was the dentist, got himself involved in making violins and making bows, and he let the orchestra go by the board. In the meantime, the best that I got out of the orchestra was a Los Angeles Athletic Club membership; I took the boys down there, and they learned how to swim, and they learned to fence and all the rest of it.

GARDNER: How did that come about? How does the Athletic Club tie in to the orchestra?

COWAN: We played for the Athletic Club for about two years as their orchestra, just intermittently, once a month or once in two months or something. Whenever they

had an affair down there, why, we were their orchestra for this period.

GARDNER: Terrific. Was that your last musical venture, or did you keep up with music after that?

COWAN: No, I haven't kept up with music.

GARDNER: Oh, that's too bad.

COWAN: I have the old piano here that all the Cowan tribe learned to play on, but then I don't use it myself. The only musical attainment I have at the present time is to tune that piano, to a certain extent. [laughter]

GARDNER: Now, you ran your stamp company, from the information I have, from 1933 to 1942. What happened after that?

COWAN: In 1942, father died and left me a bit of money, and I put that into property.

GARDNER: So that's when you became involved in the . . .

COWAN: The stamp business was entering a new phase as far as a lease was concerned, and I couldn't see any future for it with the war on, so I got out of there. It wasn't a big-paying thing, anyhow, although it gave me a living for a while. And then a bit before this time, I got into yachting, and I bought a boat that was built in 1902 by Fellows and Stewart.

GARDNER: Right. We talked about that, I think, last time on the video. That's a terrific story about building your own boat. What was it called, the Stella Maris?

COWAN: The Venus. The Venus was the first one, and then I built the Regina Maris.

GARDNER: Regina Maris, right. I also have down here something called Washington Holding Company that's in your biography in the Who's Who. What does that mean?

COWAN: Well, this holding company had a building down at Washington and Towne Avenue in Los Angeles, and it was actually set up as a hospital building; if and when they could lease it in that area, why, they ran it, and the holding company simply held that for various stockholders. A friend of mine got me involved in that, because he didn't know where to go for another director. It meant nothing, actually; it wasn't big and it wasn't small. It was just a place to go down and get twenty to thirty dollars per meeting.

GARDNER: Oh, I see. So mostly, then, from the point of your father's death, you subsisted on the properties?

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: Well, I don't know what you'd like to say about your family history, your children and so on. Would you like to talk a little bit about them--what they've become, where they are now, your grandchildren and so on?

COWAN: Well, I had two sons, William and Robert, and of course they were both in World War II. William was on a Y boat which carried gasoline all around the Pacific, and

it was a great worry to his family, naturally. Robert joined the coast guard, and he was one of the first seamen on horseback patrolling the beach at Monterey. Then he was sent to Washington, D.C., and was the first enlisted man from the coast guard and the first that passed through the Naval Research Academy there, on account of his mathematics. When he was in high school his advisor told him he wasn't fit for mathematics, but he stuck to it and got up through calculus before he got out of high school. And then from there he went to this institute in Washington, D.C., and carried on further. He used that all through his various activities in life; he's had three jobs, I think, something of that sort, but all relied on the mathematics he'd had. And just now, and for the last ten years or more, he's been with the Hughes Company in their function of sending these things in the atmosphere that relay all kinds of messages to earth and around the earth. He's involved with the six as his unit, as a working unit; he's been working with them now for quite some time.

The other son, William, after floundering around a bit, went with the General Electric Company. For twenty years he has been a salesman in the parts department. For three years, I think, he's been the top salesman this side of the Mississippi, and he's gotten bonuses and whatnot for that. That's more on account of the position, I think,

than it is the effort. Although he's not in charge of the department at San Jose, he still is in the position to take in the orders as they come in by phone and not go after them.

GARDNER: Oh, that's nice. That's a nice position.

COWAN: It gives him a nice operation. I guess he can accommodate himself to that job very well. He's been there for twenty years or more now.

GARDNER: Well, let's move on, then, and talk about the historical societies. You've been very closely involved with the Historical Society of Southern California for some time. When did you begin your affiliation with them, do you recall?

COWAN: It was in 1958. I walked into one of their meetings one night, and there were quite a few people--some of Dawson's clerks and Anna Marie Hager--and they cabbaged onto me and got me to join at that time. I was only in a short time before Anna Marie was president, and then I was elected director; and it was three years on and one off, and it's been that way with me ever since. I moved their library, actually, three times when I joined the society. I took over the obligation of moving the library, and together with Doyce Nunis and Ray Billington we disposed of much outside material that was in the library and stuff that we didn't want, mostly valueless stuff, and moved the

library from Eighth and Hill down to 240 Broadway, which is on the site of the old city hall. It was moved onto the fifth floor upstairs in this empty building (except the ground floor had some tenants in there); then it was moved into the basement of that building, and then from there to the Lummis home. I supervised all the three movings, which was quite a job.

GARDNER: I can imagine.

COWAN: Yes. The last move was shuttling between 240 Broadway and the Lummis home, and we had three small trucks that shuttled for a whole day in moving this stuff out; so it was quite an operation.

GARDNER: That seems to be one of your areas of expertise, moving libraries.

COWAN: [laughter] Yes--father's, my own. When I moved here, I had books; and, of course, with books you have to take them off the shelves, package them. And then I had to store them in a garage. I filled the garage with cartons up to about five feet high. There wasn't room for another carton in the place. And then I set the shelves and cases up here and then got the books out; that's really two movings in one, and it kept me busy for a while. I built the house myself, as contractor. I'd come from my house with a load of books, dropped them in the garage in the neighborhood of the place that I was

building, and as I assumed the contractorship of the building, I had to come over there every two days or so to watch. And so there wasn't any difficulty about moving the books.

GARDNER: Back to the historical society. You mentioned that you were a director. Could you explain something about how the historical society runs and what different people to as far as making it run.

COWAN: Well, it's comprised of a group of people to promote history, a friendly group of people, not necessarily historians, but they're social minded, and they enjoy getting together. Because we've found over the years that the dinner programs we have induce more people to come than just the straight historical programs. Of course, we always have some kind of a historical talk for the nine months of the year, but not during the summer. Then we have other meetings, our Christmas party, and then another meeting to meet new directors, generally in the afternoon at the Lummis home. Then we have a trek once a year, anywhere within a reasonable distance of Los Angeles, which is a day's trek. It generally averages anywhere from seven to nine hours, the trek.

GARDNER: That's a lot of trek.

COWAN: Yes, and everybody enjoys it. This last trek, why, ninety-five people turned up--two busloads. Everybody

enjoyed it very much; no complaints. There generally is a complaint from some of the people that shouldn't travel. [laughter] They can't see things as they are at home, so they don't like it.

GARDNER: What were some of your functions during the years you've been a director, the three years on and one year off?

COWAN: Well, I've been stuck on various committees--the nominating committee a few times, and actually I'm supposed to be the librarian at the present time. It's the library committee, but the committee doesn't function; I'm the only one that does much, although I get somebody outside the committee to help.

GARDNER: How big is the library?

COWAN: Very, very small. It's been a gift library, and we've not been able to buy anything. We're in a better position in that regard now because we're disposing of the material that has no historical connection with Southern California and then putting that back into things that do, particularly aimed at Los Angeles and its history. We dispose of all the other stuff anywhere that we can. We put out a list, and that goes to all the members, and members have first choice of everything. And then the rest is packaged up and dumped here and there to booksellers or wherever we can.

GARDNER: It sounds as though you're among the most active member of the organization.

COWAN: So they say. [laughter]

GARDNER: You're also a member of the California Historical Society.

COWAN: No longer.

GARDNER: No longer?

COWAN: No.

GARDNER: How did that work? How long were you involved with them, and were you ever active with them the way you are with the other?

COWAN: No, never. I devoted my attention to Southern California because I lived here. Of course, I knew a great many of the people of the California Historical Society also, because there's duplication of membership between the two societies. I used to go to their meetings when I was near San Francisco, if they happened to have a meeting, and I'd meet some of them. At one of the meetings we had Thomas Streeter and some one of the other bibliographers (I can't bring up his name at the present time), and we three were honored by introduction. It was [Carl] Wheat, the other bibliographer. And the three of us there at once were introduced to the membership as the three bibliographers of California. Outside of that I didn't have very much contact with the members, although some of

the members, when they'd come into Los Angeles, would come into the house and we'd have a little visit. George Harding and several of them came down here. Somebody put out a résumé, about ten years ago, of all the people who built the society up there and had something to do with it and promoted it and so forth. Father was a member of the directors practically all of its life, and he was president at one time, and he'd written many, many reviews and articles that were in the quarterly; but whoever wrote this résumé of the activities of the society left out the name of Cowan entirely. So I thought as long as the name Cowan was not involved in the society, I should back out; so I did. Kind of sour grapes, [laughter] but then I felt it at that time, so I never joined again.

GARDNER: You've been active also in the Friends of the UCLA Library, of course.

COWAN: Just as far as the meeting is concerned. I haven't missed many of those ever since I joined ten or fifteen years ago.

GARDNER: You've never been involved in the . . .

COWAN: No, none of their activities.

GARDNER: You're just a dinner visitor.

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: Same with the Huntington?

COWAN: Same with the Huntington. I went to very few of

their meetings because their meetings were generally at noon in the middle of the day, and I didn't appreciate luncheons and meetings of that kind--and I still don't. [laughter]

GARDNER: Driving to Pasadena in the middle of the day.

COWAN: Yes. But I dropped the membership just a few years ago at the Huntington because I wasn't getting anything out of it particularly.

GARDNER: Now, you're the author of a number of works, more than you had listed yourself in the biography, I found when I went through the card catalog at UCLA. I'll name a few, and then you can name others that you've done in addition to that. The first one, of course, was the bibliography with your father. Had you done any writing of any kind before that, any work along those lines?

COWAN: No. Oh, for the high school annual, I wrote a story, plagiarized mostly. [laughter]

GARDNER: If the truth be known. So the bibliography was really the first?

COWAN: That was really the first attempt, yes.

GARDNER: What was your role on it? How did the two of you divide up responsibilities and so on, putting that bibliography out?

COWAN: There was no division of responsibility. Well, there was in responsibilities, but there wasn't any division

of labor or work because father was involved with the Clark Library and I was involved in his library. It started off by writing a catalog of his library in bibliographical form, and it continued. Of course, he'd look over my shoulder once in a while, but the whole thing was dropped in my lap. Out of the 5,000 titles, he supplied, probably from his notes, about 200 titles, and the rest was all out of his library; and it was my activity in that direction that made the bibliography.

GARDNER: So you really had to go through book by book and notate each one.

COWAN: Yes, I did.

GARDNER: Had you had any experience doing this before?

COWAN: No, that was my first attempt.

GARDNER: Baptism by fire.

COWAN: Yes. Of course, I had his earlier bibliographies for form and everything of that sort, although he watched the form until I really assumed the writing of it entirely by myself. Of course, he checked everything out before it ever went to Nash, the printer, but the whole bibliography was actually my work (although I wasn't qualified in the beginning to do it).

GARDNER: You were, in the end.

COWAN: So they say. [laughter]

GARDNER: Well then, the next thing you have down among

your writings is The Booksellers of Early San Francisco, which is 1953. Can you talk about how you came to do that, and what the reason for it was?

COWAN: Well, father left the manuscript--that was the last thing he wrote, and it hadn't been seen by anybody and there had been no attempt to publish it. So I edited it and shortened it, because by that time father had put in a lot of repetition that should have been taken out, for one thing. The main portion of The Booksellers of Early San Francisco is all father's writing; outside of shortening it, I changed no language or anything of that sort. And then I added his biography to it and a bibliography of his writings.

GARDNER: Right. Now, who published that?

COWAN: Ward Ritchie published it, and it got in the Rounce and Coffin and went around to the rest of the nation on the exhibit of the Rounce and Coffin books of that year.

GARDNER: Oh, outstanding books.

COWAN: Which made me very proud, naturally.

GARDNER: Of course. Did it have an overwhelming sale?

COWAN: No, it was a very slow seller. The field is very small.

GARDNER: It continues to sell today, though, I imagine.

COWAN: Oh, it sold out nearly ten years ago, and there's been a trickle of a demand ever since which cannot be filled;

but it's still there.

GARDNER: There's no thought of a reprint?

COWAN: No. There wouldn't be enough of a field for it to be reprinted, I'm quite sure, because the old-timers that knew father or anything about him have gone. The newer institutions might be induced to purchase it, but the older institutions have it and that'd be it.

GARDNER: Right. Then there's Ranchos of California, from 1956. Now, this is probably a work completely on your own at this point.

COWAN: Yes. Father left me a tin box of Henry W. Halleck of Halleck, Peachy, and Billings, and in that box there was this notation of what I suppose were court cases, or just simply notations of ranchos that they were handling in court--no date or anything of that sort, but just a listing of the ranchos. And that induced me to make a search of the ranchos through everything that I could find that was available and come up with a list of the ranchos, gotten as far as possible from the state surveyor; pinpoint them, not by surveyor's chains or anything of that sort, but just pinpoint the nearest town or the nearest locale. Then I went back to the various grantees that were known and also through the later claimants that got the eventual disposition of the ranchos, and jotted them all down. The book is quite complete in itself. It

has a glossary and a listing of governors and a listing of the claimants and the grantees and dates and so forth. So it's self-contained. And I was floundering around and came up with Monsignor Culleton up at Fresno. He was very much interested, and it was published up there by the Academy Library Guild. And that's how it came about: he published it; I didn't publish it myself.

GARDNER: I see. How did that one do?

COWAN: At first, nothing, and then it became scarce. It was published, I think, at first at six and a half [dollars], and it became quite scarce. The price got up to fifteen or twenty dollars in the booksellers so I thought it was time to do it again, which I did a year and a half ago. And it's been going slowly. I almost got my money out the first year, so I'm satisfied. But there was a place for it; there is a place for it, still.

GARDNER: Right. One that fascinates me is the Bibliography of Congressional Speeches upon the Admission of California that you did in 1962.

COWAN: I had probably the most outstanding collection of separates in the United States. I had a great percentage of those; they're all marked in the bibliography as to whether a separate was seen, and I had all those separates myself. And from that point, why, nothing has ever been done in that direction, so I got copies of the Congressional Globe, as the publication was called at that time (later

called the Congressional Record), and traced down all the speeches, and I think that is the most complete bibliography that's ever been issued. Because everything that was mentioned in Congress is in the Congressional Globe, so I don't think there was any speech that was missed. [laughter] I took them all out of there. Of course, there's earlier speeches before that era that might have some connection with California, but not as far as the statehood is concerned. It began in 1848, the moment we took over California from Mexico. They began to talk about it in Congress, and then, of course, after gold was discovered, California asked for admission on her own. Of course, there was a year of talk. It took them a full year of congressional talk, to the exclusion of everything else, practically, as far as government business was concerned.

GARDNER: It's a fascinating area to have covered. Who published that?

COWAN: I published that.

GARDNER: You did that yourself. Who was the printer?

COWAN: It was printed at the Torrez Press of Los Angeles. The pressman was a Greek graduate from an Egyptian university. The linotyper was Mexican and spoke or read no English. He operated a Greek machine, but the book came out without any international complications.

GARDNER: I just thought there might be some stories, some connection having to do with the printing. How did that one sell?

COWAN: Very slowly; it's still selling slowly.

GARDNER: Yes, well, the nature of these books is such that that's how they would sell.

COWAN: Well, there's very few places for it, actually.

GARDNER: Right, but nonetheless it's the sort of thing for which demand would be constant. A couple of people every year would find out about it and want to add it to their collection.

COWAN: I felt it was a record that should be preserved regardless of the consequences, because there's nowhere you can find a list of that kind, and not a complete list, either.

GARDNER: Another one of your publications was A Backward Glance: Los Angeles 1901-1915, and that was put out as a 200th anniversary publication, wasn't it?

COWAN: The Southern California historical society got a collection of pictures that had never been used before that came from a private source, along with many pictures outside of California. But these are all from Los Angeles, and outside of a few pictures in the book, which is a pictorial, all of them came from that source. In order to preserve the pictures and broadcast them, I thought it

would be a good idea to publish the thing for the society. And it has done very well and is doing very well; there's a great deal of interest. A great many visitors come to the Lummis home, and every once in a while they buy one. And the county museum has had them in stock all the time, and they've done quite well, also. Then, through the booksellers all over the United States, every once in a while an order comes in from a bookseller; somebody's caught onto it and wants to see the pictures. So it's doing quite well.

GARDNER: I have down that it's the 200th anniversary of something. It was put out by Torrez Press?

COWAN: They were the printers, yes.

GARDNER: And my notes say (my notes are incomprehensible, I understand), "Historical Society, 200th anniversary." What was it the 200th anniversary of?

COWAN: The founding of San Diego mission and beginning of California.

GARDNER: Is there any other book?

COWAN: Yes, there's another--On the Rails of Los Angeles. It shows many of the streetcars, not the Red Cars, but the streetcars of Los Angeles; I got most of the pictures from the same source, the Historical Society of Southern California.

GARDNER: When did you do that?

COWAN: After the Backward Glance. That's the second book,

and that's done very well also. The society sells a lot of them, and, of course, the Orange Empire Railway Museum sells a lot of them. There's a lot of railroad buffs, and they're all involved in streetcars as much as trains, and it's done quite well.

GARDNER: That's it then for the publications of Robert G. Cowan. Let's go back now and talk about the Cowan collection and then also the Cowan papers, which I assume were given separately, or sold separately, to UCLA. You'll have to clarify this for me because I'm not exactly clear about how it works. When your father died, the major collection of his books went to UCLA, is that true?

COWAN: No, the collection went to UCLA in 1936.

GARDNER: What was the circumstance of that? How did that work? Was it a gift, or was it a negotiated sale?

COWAN: It was a negotiated sale for $50,000--$25,000 the first year and annual payments to 1939.

GARDNER: I see. Who negotiated with whom? Was it something he had done before his death to set it up?

COWAN: The indenture was signed by the Regents of the University of California, William H. Crocker, chairman, and Robert M. Underhill, secretary. After he moved out of the last Clark house that he was living in, the library was too cumbersome to move around, and he had no further use for it. There wasn't another bibliography possible to

come out of it, so he decided that he was going to sell it; so he did.

GARDNER: That was before his death, then, that that happened. It would have been in the thirties.

COWAN: Oh, yes. It was six years before his death. And, of course, it was more than Californiana that's in the collection, because the whole Pacific Coast--British Columbia, Washington, Oregon--was represented in the library that went to UCLA. And he took a list, or made a rough list, and turned it over for the edification and for the sales promotion to the library. And they debated for a very short time the $50,000, which was probably a very modest sum today. [laughter] And he sold it. He did not list any of his manuscripts, so there was a backlog of something like about $12,000 worth of manuscripts--not his own papers but manuscripts of one kind or another. Eventually Larry Powell found out about it and came to the house and surveyed them and wanted them. So he set up a price. Of course, the price that I asked didn't work, so he chiseled, and I gave half of them to the UCLA Library [Department of] Special Collections, and then they paid me the other half in cash for the manuscripts.

GARDNER: This is the correspondence and so on?

COWAN: No correspondence of father's, simply early papers of William H. Davis, Parrot Folsom, Leidesdorff, D.B. Wilson,

etc.

GARDNER: Oh, I see.

COWAN: The kinds of correspondence that are relative to this history of California, for instance. There's much from Halleck, Peachy, and Billings and from other sources, the Parrots, the Parrot Building and their outfit, from that nature, the business nature in San Francisco, not early manuscripts in Spanish or anything of that sort--a few. There were some very good documents as far as the conquest was concerned; there's about four or five letters of Fremont-Gillespie etc. etc. that are very good. When father died he'd written to Thomas Norris about those letters, and Thomas wanted them, but he didn't get them; UCLA got them.

GARDNER: When would that have been?

COWAN: That would have been in 1945.

GARDNER: Okay, so then all that's left then is the collection that I went through before I came to talk to you, the collection of his own personal correspondence and papers.

COWAN: Yes. I gave those at a much later date to the university. I didn't give them everything; I kept out a few notes which the university will get eventually. But the bulk of it went to them. Of course, father wrote everything in longhand, and he didn't keep copies of

anything, so what they got was simply correspondence from other people and nothing of his.

GARDNER: Well, not nothing; as I recall, there were one or two things written in scratch letter or something like a list or something like, today he wrote to Mr. Such and such and a list of what he wrote or sort of a summary of what he wrote.

COWAN: Yes, he did that, but he generally kept the letters and answered on them, and that was done that way. But what he wrote was not copied. Once in a while, for unusual letters, he'd take the back of an old envelope or any piece of scratch paper that he'd find around the place and write that. Well, there's some of those that I have still extant, but not many, because he didn't do that very often.

GARDNER: Was that collection, then, a gift to the library?

COWAN: Yes.

GARDNER: That was! That's very generous. I was fascinated by some of the letters in there, naturally. I mean, it would be hard not to be fascinated by them, and we talked about many of the ones that had to do with San Francisco. But I found at one point a letter from Ambrose Bierce and was sort of stunned. I guess Bierce was about to go into Mexico again or something like that, and he wrote to your father pertaining to some books, and so forth; but it was a friendly note, too. Were you aware of any kind of

correspondence between them?

COWAN: I did have at one time what was supposed to be the last letter that Ambrose Bierce wrote from Mexico, and the only thing I remember about it--I don't remember what the subject was and I don't think it was to father--but to identify it, it ended up, "With charity for none and malice for all." Is that the letter?

GARDNER: I think so.

COWAN: Well, I never knew where that went until just now.

GARDNER: Yes, it's there.

COWAN: I had that letter; I don't think it was addressed to father.

GARDNER; I think it was.

COWAN: It was?

GARDNER: I think it was, which fascinated me, because I was unaware that they would have had any kind of contact. But it may be that Bierce's interest in the West and the history of Mexico perhaps had gotten them in touch. You recall that; I know that's a wonderful slogan. Well, I think I'm about out of questions. Is there anything that we've overlooked that you can think of?

COWAN: Well, there's one contact that father wasn't particularly proud of (and neither was the other person), and that was Charles C. Russell. Father had no respect for him particularly, except for the choice of the material

that he reprinted. Because, as I understand it (I never checked it out), Russell edited all the material that he did publish--and mighty fine source material it was--and he changed things to suit himself. And in that particular angle, he came head-on to what father thought ought to be done with the publications. Maybe it was over the years, and maybe it was just one contact, but he had no respect for father, and father had no respect for him either, personally. Russell probably had a colossal ego, because there's a letter that's been reprinted which he'd addressed to the state librarian--Ferguson at that time, I believe--telling about his operations and condemning Nash and the Divine Press (in fact, he calls Nash the biggest faker in the printing world) and also deriding father in his angle towards Russell's publications. The editor of this just recently, in 1970 it was, did not know the background, and he said that father left out all the things in the 1933 bibliography that Russell had done. That's quite true, because at that time we didn't have space to put in every edition that was ever published about the history of California; so those reprints were left out definitely for that reason. The source books are in there, except for one or two things like Shirley papers that hadn't been done up to the Russell time. And then this editor mentioned that in the addenda to the bibliography Cowan broke down and

put them in. Well, Cowan was dead at that time, and I put them in my Volume IV that I added to the bibliography, because they weren't in the original. So that was one of the angles that father had with one of the printers in San Francisco. I don't suppose that Grabhorn was involved in that because Grabhorn came along a little bit later, and probably Russell would have discounted him also like he did everybody else. He wasn't popular around San Francisco at all. And his books are not left out of the bibliography for any prejudice that father had against Russell but simply the prejudice of what the bibliography should contain.

GARDNER: Well, that's very interesting. Shall we use that as our closing note, then?

COWAN: All right.

GARDNER: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Cowan. I've enjoyed it.

COWAN: Well, I have too.

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